健速
Takehaya
不屈の魔王!?
9
CORONA

六畳間の侵略者!? 9

それぞれの

バレンタイン事情

うむ。

って事は、

きた！

はい、孝木郎君♥

うぐぅ～～

「殿下……」
「……主従揃って、同じ間違いを犯すか……」

健速 たけはや

「あの日々をもういちど」（HJ文庫）で作家デビュー。
冬場は手足が冷たくなって動きが鈍くなるので、こたつから出られない毎日を送っている。

ポコ

兵庫県出身のイラストレーター。
好物はやきそば。最近は究麺焼そばにハマリ中。

カバーイラスト／ポコ　装丁／渡辺宏一

た03-02-11

健速

六畳間の侵略者!? 9

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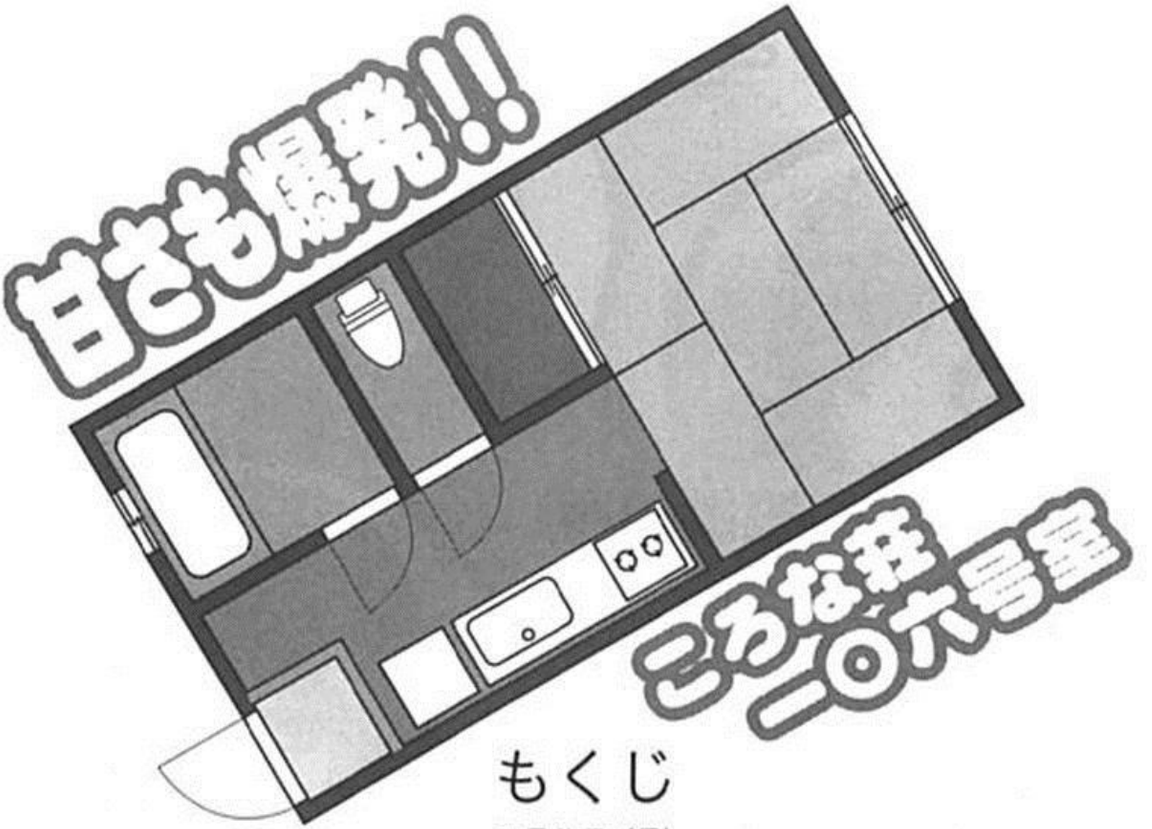

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六畳間の侵略者!?
キャラクター勢力図

幽霊
藍華真希
魔法少女
ゆりかの敵、
悪の魔法少女【ダークネイビィ】。
東本願早苗
ころな荘一〇六号室に取り憑く
幽霊少女。
虹野ゆりか
自称"魔法少女"。一〇六号室に
危機が迫っていると主張する。
ティアミリス・グレ・
フォルトーゼ
皇位継承の試練のため、
一〇六号室とその住人の支配を狙う。
宇宙人
クラリオーサ・
ダオラ・
フォルトーゼ
ティアの家と敵対している
宇宙人皇女。
ルースカニア・
ナイ・
パルドムシーハ
ティアの付き人で世話係。

Training

Part 1

February 8, Monday

Koutarou and Ruth's morning started early. By five in the morning, they had already woken up and had headed out for their daily run. On their running course, they ran towards the river from Corona House, and then they continued along the flow of the river on the promenade that had recently been maintained.

The physical training Ruth had started with during the later half of last year had shown very promising results as they entered February, and her fitness had completely changed since she began. Her daily exercise that she never skipped out on had let her understand the trick in how to move her body. As a result, Ruth didn't end in the same sorrow state as Yurika.

As expected from Flairhan's descendant, I guess… Ruth-san really does have the talent for this…

Her improvement was enough to earn admiration from Koutarou. At first she had been completely out of breath after running, but that was no longer the case. She lightly wiped some sweat away and smiled at Koutarou.

“Satomi-sama, will we be doing some muscle training today as well?”

After running several kilometers down the promenade, they would start with some muscle training in a more open space by the riverbed. That had been their morning training menu for these past few months. They had just now finished running and normally they were supposed to start their muscle training.

By the way, at first, Sanae and Yurika had joined in as well, but they quickly dropped out giving reasons such as it being too cold and that they were too sleepy. As a result, the only ones doing this training menu were Koutarou and Ruth.

“No, I think it's about time we start with the main training.”

However, Koutarou shook his head. That unexpected answer made Ruth opened her eyes wide and tilt her head.

“Main training?”

“Yes. Ruth-san, you've gotten enough physical strength, so I think it's time we start practicing techniques.”

Ruth's original intention was to learn how to fight from Koutarou. The running and physical training was just preparation for that. And seeing Ruth's growth, Koutarou decided that the time to start teaching her how to fight had come.

“Then, you're finally going to teach me martial arts!?”

Ruth revealed a happy expression and made two fists and began throwing out jabs. Though since she wasn't used to hurting others, her fists didn't look like they would hurt very much. Koutarou revealed a slight smile when he saw that and shook his head.

“No, I think this would be better for you than martial arts.”

“This?”

Ruth lowered her fists and gave Koutarou a suspicious glance. Koutarou left Ruth be and approached the luggage he had left nearby. The luggage consisted of two sport bags and a leather case for carrying baseball bats. Koutarou picked up the leather bat case.

“Will… we be using a bat?”

Koutarou's heavy wooden bat was always in that case. And while helping with Ruth's muscle training, Koutarou would swing that bat from time to time. Ruth was convinced that Koutarou would teach her how to fight using a bat.

“Ahaha, that's not it.”

Koutarou laughed as he loosened the fasteners and the contents of the case was revealed. Inside was not a bat, but two swords. One was a traditional Forthorthe knight sword, and the other was much thinner and was for thrusting. They were practice weapons without blades.

“Then, it's sword fighting?”

“Yes. I felt like this would suit you better, Ruth-san.”

As Koutarou said that, he handed the thin sword over to Ruth.

Ruth lightly swung the sword in her hand. Since she was from a family of knights, she had received training in how to use swords, though that was a long time ago, she had no difficulties in using it.

As I thought, this is better…

There were, in total, three reasons for why Koutarou was going to teach Ruth sword fighting instead of martial arts.

The first reason was that Ruth's body was small. It was far more realistic for her to use a weapon to reach the level of combat capability she desired than going in unarmed. Since Ruth was a knight, the weapon of choice naturally became a sword. And if she was going to use a sword, a thin one was best. The traditional Forthorthe knight sword was too large to use with her small body and would throw her off balance.

The second reason was that Koutarou was better with a sword than with his fists. His experiences in the past Forthorthe had raised his skills considerably. As a result, he was more skilled using the disciplined methods that Theia had taught him rather than his self-developed fighting techniques.

The final reason was that Koutarou remembered Flair, who was a master at using a thin sword. He had spent almost every day practicing with her while he had been in Forthorthe. As a result, he was very used with that type of sword handling. So all he had to do was teach Ruth that.

With those three reasons, Koutarou had decided to teach Ruth sword fighting, rather than martial arts. Teaching Flair's techniques to Ruth was something that made Koutarou's heart leap with joy.

Part 2

Ruth's sword cut through the early morning's cold air. Her movements were still faltering, but it didn't look like she was being thrown around by the sword's weight. This was a result of the physical training Ruth had gone through up until today.

"Does, this look, good?"

"Yeah, keep at it like that. But make sure your elbow doesn't fall too far when you thrust."

"Yes, Satomi-sama!"

Koutarou observed Ruth from the front and made slight alterations to her form to make it more similar to the memory he had of Flair.

She really does look like her…

Ruth looked very similar to Flair, not just in appearance, but in the way she handled the sword. Ruth was in no way near the same level as Flair, but their appearances would sometimes overlap. As a result, Koutarou's expression naturally turned more mild.

"Ah…"

Noticing the change in Koutarou's expression, Ruth instinctively stopped moving her sword.

The expression he had on his face was something she had never seen before. It was gentle, calm but somewhat lonely. She felt like staring at that smile forever, but at the same time she wanted to do something about it. It was a mysterious smile that greatly shook Ruth's feelings.

"What's wrong, Ruth-san?"

Confused that Ruth had stopped moving, Koutarou called out to her.

"Ah, s-sorry, Satomi-sama!"

Koutarou's expression changed and Ruth returned to herself.

"It's just, t-that, this is a somehow strange feeling…"

That said, she couldn't just admit to looking at Koutarou admiringly, so she quickly covered it up.

"I know how you feel."

Koutarou failed to notice Ruth's intentions and just nodded his head. He agreed with what Ruth had desperately spat out and he didn't notice Ruth's face turning red.

"I learned how to use a sword from you, and now I'm the one teaching. It really is a strange feeling."

Up until now, Ruth had used a large sword in her fights. However, that sword was a creation of the advanced technology of Forthorthe, and didn't make much use of her own skills. And when Theia had taught Koutarou how to use a sword for the play, Ruth had been his sparring partner. One could say that Ruth was his teacher, and this reversal of roles felt very strange.

"…That's just because the sword is strong."

"I'm sure you'll get stronger too, Ruth-san."

"I hope so…"

After exchanging a few words, Ruth readied her sword again. Seeing that, Koutarou confronted Ruth with his own sword.

"Satomi-sama?"

"Try attacking me a little. That should give you a way to measure your own capabilities."

Training

As Koutarou said that he focused on his eyes. When he did, he could see a faint white light enveloping her body. That light was the spiritual energy running through her body. Koutarou was planning on more accurately understanding the difference between Flair and Ruth by examining the flow of her spiritual energy.

“But, isn't it dangerous?”

“Don't worry, these are just practice weapons.”

Koutarou smiled and touched the blade of his own sword. Their weapons were both intended to be used for practice, so the blades had been swapped out with a softer material. In short, there was no worry for any injuries.

“Okay, I'll give it a shot.”

Ruth nodded and showed a serious expression. She readied her sword and pointed the tip towards Koutarou. It was a beautiful form, just like Koutarou had taught her.

Hmm… her form is good, but she's hesitant in her aim. And…

Ruth's intention to attack was moving around Koutarou, looking for an opening. When he was facing Flair, she would have already decided on where to aim. Since this was a difference in experience, Koutarou felt like it couldn't be helped.

“Here I come!”

Ruth stepped forward. Her movements were different from that of a girl her age. The results of her physical training showed itself here as well.

It's just as I thought…

However, Koutarou had sensed a problem within the spiritual energy that Ruth was emitting. He felt like it was a bigger problem than not settling for a target.

“Ruth-san, be more serious.”

“I'm being serious!”

Ruth moved in with a swift step and thrust while extending her arm. Koutarou responded by changing the incline on his sword a little.

When he did, Ruth's thrust struck the flat of his sword and recoiled.

“This is, my best!”

Despite her first strike being blocked, Ruth didn't stop. Ruth spoke as she unleashed attack after attack. Her combination didn't just consist of thrusts, but also slashes, and this was without a doubt Ruth's current best. Meanwhile, Koutarou read her aura and blocked her attacks while trying to think of a way to explain to her. Since she had just started her practice, Koutarou still had enough room to think while parrying her attacks.

“That's not what I meant… Uhm, I want you to seriously try to kill me.”

After deflecting several thrusts, Koutarou moved smoothly as he explained to Ruth.

“Try to kill, Satomi-sama…?”

However, Ruth who was just listening completely stopped. Still holding her sword she furrowed her brows and showed a troubled expression.

“That's right. Ruth-san, you're trying to avoid hurting me, right?”

“That's… that's true, but…”

Training

Ruth lowered her sword and after glancing down on it, she gazed at Koutarou, deep in thought. However, she quickly shook her head.

“That would be hard. Satomi-sama is not an enemy after all…”

“It's a training weapon, so I'll be okay.”

“Even if you say that…”

Ruth was very troubled. Since she had such trust in Koutarou, it was difficult for her to seriously turn her sword against him.

This had been the problem that Koutarou had sensed. Ruth's sword was too gentle. Even if her hesitant aim had been because of her lack of experience, her gentleness limited her potential targets. As a result, her abilities were limited even more than her lack of experience.

“Then how about this. Imagine that I suddenly betrayed you and that I'm now about to attack Theia.”

After thinking for a while, Koutarou came up with that suggestion. Ruth's gentleness was a big merit, but at this rate, it would become an obstacle in their training. So he wanted Ruth to forget about her gentleness during their practice.

“That's not possible.”

However, Ruth shook her head again. To her, it was a flat out impossibility that Koutarou would turn on Theia. If that hadn't been the case, she wouldn't have asked him to serve Theia.

“Now what do I do…”

Koutarou smiled wryly while scratching his head. He was happy that Ruth believed in him, but this was a problem if he was going to teach her how to sword fight.

Just like Yurika, Ruth isn't suited to fight… It would probably be the same, even if I wasn't her opponent.

Ruth's sword would surely dull even if she was facing Yurika, Sanae or even Kiriha. She was just too gentle.

“Then how about this. Your opponent isn't me, but an assassin targeting Theia.”

“Then… could you please hide your face… when I'm looking at your face, I naturally let my guard down, Satomi-sama…”

Ruth understood what Koutarou was trying to say as well. But even then it was hard for her to point her sword against someone she trusted as much as Theia.

Satomi-sama is being too unreasonable. There's no way an assassin would have such a kind face…

It was hard enough for Ruth to show any hostility towards Koutarou as it was. But since he would show a gentle and somewhat lonely expression whenever she held her sword, any hostility and will to fight she had was erased. In this sense, there was no one harder for Ruth to point a sword against than Koutarou.

“Was I making such a funny face?”

Koutarou touched his own face, unaware of Ruth's feelings. Seeing him like that, her feelings unintentionally turned into words and escaped from her lips.

“…Stupid…”

They were sweet words from the normally moderate Ruth.

Training

“What did you say, Ruth-sa—”

Just as Koutarou was replying to Ruth, he found he didn't have the time to speak.

An enemy!?

Something had jumped into his mind. That was a strong hostility and six intentions to attack. The moment Koutarou sensed that, he began moving.

A sniper!? There are six attacks, is the enemy above!?

Sensing hostility that Ruth wasn't able to muster, Koutarou's trained body sprung into action. The blood in his body boiled and spiritual energy began flowing. The spiritual energy circuits Sanae would use to strengthen Koutarou from time to time were still present and his hand began moving before commands from his nerves arrived. And his sword slashed out in front of Ruth.

The next moment, a bullet crashed into the flat of the sword.

“Kyaaa!?”

Ruth finally realized that they were being attacked upon hearing the sound of the bullet crashing into the sword. However, since she had completely dropped her guard, she was overwhelmed with surprise and she was unable to take any action. Ruth really wasn't suited to fight.

All that's left is…!

Meanwhile, Koutarou was continuing to move. He swung his sword with his right hand while making wide dodges.

The next moment, a bullet whizzed by where Koutarou's right shoulder had been and buried itself into the riverbed. Immediately after that, he swung his sword upwards and placed it in front of his face.

Then, two bullets hit the sword. One by the tip and the other near the handle. They had been aimed for his head and torso.

…Another two shots!

There were still two intentions to attack, chasing after Koutarou. They were aimed at his right leg and body. That was when Koutarou planted his left foot down and jumped. With that, he was able to avoid the first shot that had been aimed at his leg. Since Koutarou moved, the second shot missed as well and only grazed his side.

“That's six shots!”

After avoiding all six shots, Koutarou quickly looked up. There, he saw a lone girl. She was holding a large rifle in her hands and was floating in the sky without any support. That sight didn't surprise Koutarou and he called out to the girl.

“That's quite the rude morning greeting, Clan.”

The name of the girl floating in the sky was Clariossa Daora Forthorthe, or Clan for short.

She was Forthorthe royalty, like Theia and had a rather deep connection to Koutarou.

“I'm quite surprised, Ber— whoops, Koutarou, so you can block bullets even without the armor.”

Clan smiled wryly and lowered her rifle. The device she was using to float in the sky was her own invention. Its performance was excellent and the hem of the dress she was wearing wasn't moving at all.

“My strength didn't have much to do with it.”

Training

Koutarou would not have been able to block the shots without the power he had gotten from Sanae. He dropped his shoulders and sighed. At the same time, Ruth who was right next to Koutarou pointed her sword towards Clan who had just landed.

“Clan-sama! Are you targeting Satomi-sama again!?”

Ruth had been unable to do so towards Koutarou, but she showed hostility towards Clan. They had been attacked several times now, and Ruth glared at Clan with a serious expression.

“…It's okay, Ruth-san.”

Koutarou smiled at Ruth and lowered her sword with his hand.

“But Satomi-sama!”

“That was just a greeting… Of course, it was in pretty bad taste.”

“I don't want to hear those words coming from you.”

Having heard the words bad taste, Clan showed a discouraged expression as she adjusted her glasses and she gave orders to the bracelet on her right wrist.

“Cradle, recover the weapon.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

The next moment a black hole appeared next to Clan. The hole was connected to her spaceship, the Cradle, and after she had inserted her weapon into the hole, it vanished.

The weapon she had used to snipe Koutarou and Ruth had vanished without a trace.

“Ruth-san, try attacking me like that in our future practice.”

“S-Satomi-sama?”

Koutarou smiled at the puzzled Ruth and left her behind as he approached Clan. His appearance was completely defenseless as he casually walked towards her.

“I thought I could get you if you weren't wearing your armor, but it seems like that's not possible.”

“If those had been actual bullets, you probably would have shot straight through the sword.”

“You barefaced liar. You knew it was me from the start.”

And Clan showed no signs of attacking Koutarou. She seemed a bit displeased, but that was just insinuation towards someone she had a friendly relation with.

“I just believed that her highness Clariossa who I hold in high esteem would use real bullets because she is so sly.”

“Y-You little- next time I'll definitely greet you with real bullets! I mean it!”

“See? You would use actual bullets.”

“Kuh, you also have some witty remark! You are so hate able!”

“It is an honor to receive praise directly from her highness.”

“I'm not praising you!”

Koutarou and Clan's lively conversation continued, and Ruth who was looking on couldn't hide her confusion.

Just… what is going on…?

She had heard that Koutarou and Clan had to work together to return after being thrown out of the universe. That said, the two of them were originally enemies, so once they had returned it

would only be natural for them to become enemies again. However, it didn't look like that had happened at all. Koutarou and Clan's conversation was extremely similar to that of Koutarou and Theia's. Since the two of them had been trying to kill each other just a few days ago, that was a very confusing sight for Ruth.

And it feels like Satomi-sama's prowess with the sword is on a completely different level from before…

Another thing that confused Ruth was Koutarou's overwhelming capability with the sword.

He had received formal training from Theia for the play, he could see spiritual energy thanks to Sanae and he was good at fighting to begin with.

Training

However, even with all of that, it shouldn't be enough to block bullets. In reality, he had only reached a competent level of fighting on the day he fought Clan wearing the Blue Knight's armor.

But now he was able to block Clan's attacks despite not using the power of the armor. All he had used was a practice sword. In other words, he had gotten skilled enough with the sword to make up for the loss in power from wearing the armor.

Just what happened to Satomi-sama…? No, more importantly, just where did Satomi-sama and Clan-sama go during those few minutes…?

Koutarou's change in relationship with Clan and his rapidly improved skill with the sword only served to confuse Ruth.

“More importantly, did you finish that thing?”

“More importantly you say!? If it wasn't you, I'd have you thrown in prison for life a long time ago!”

“Don't get so angry. It's something I can only ask of you.”

“…The way you put that is very tricky and I hate it. Really…”

The two continued their carefree conversation, unaware of Ruth's feelings, but they just now got into the main topic.

“Cradle, bring that out.”

“As you wish, my princess.”

Clan ordered her bracelet and summoned a large box from her spaceship. She opened the box in front of Koutarou and the two faced each other and peeked into it.

“Is this it?”

“Yes. I made it just like you wanted it.”

Inside the box were five metallic spheres. The balls had different sizes and weights. The largest was about as big as a watermelon while the smallest was about the size of a baseball. All of them had quite a bit of weight to them, and even the smallest was very heavy when lifted.

Clan had come to deliver these balls to Koutarou. He had requested the creation of them as his training with Ruth progressed.

These five spheres were devices used for practicing sword fighting. They would produce holograms while floating in the air, which would serve as targets and sometimes counter attack. The size of the ball determined the size of the hologram and the speed at which it could move.

Clan had plenty of detailed data from hand-to-hand battles with soldiers and she had created these devices while analyzing that data. Of course, Flair's combat data was already put in as well. And if all went according to plan, Ruth could eventually reach Flair's level of fighting.

On top of that, these devices had been designed to help Koutarou practice as well. In the very peaceful Japan, there was no opportunity to use a sword. So in order to practice sword fighting, various training opponents were necessary.

Koutarou was plenty strong since he was borrowing the power of the invading girls, but that didn't mean it was okay for him to remain weak. He didn't believe that there was a need for him to be overwhelmingly powerful, but he wanted to be strong enough to lend someone his strength.

Because of that, Koutarou had asked Clan to create these training devices. Clan had accepted his request and started her production and had appeared today to deliver the completed product.

“So, how do you use them?”

“I made it so you can control them using your bracelet. Just order it like you would your armor.”

“I got it. I'll try it out later and contact you if there's something I don't understand.”

“…Seriously, you're probably the only one who would treat a princess of Forthorthe as a handyman.”

After finishing her explanation Clan folded her arms, puffed her cheeks and expressed her dissatisfaction. Her sniper attack using practice bullets had been a result of that dissatisfaction.

“It can't be helped, I don't know a scientist more amazing than you.”

“Well, I don't feel as bad after hearing that.”

“Anyways, you've been a big help, Clan.”

“Can't you be a bit more respectful in your speech?”

“I would like to express my gratitude for your cooperation, princess Clariossa.”

“Fufufu, it was nothing.”

Since Clan's dissatisfaction had only been her way of playing with her companions, she started smiling as soon as Koutarou gave her an honest thanks.

“Now you owe me a favor.”

“I know, I know.”

“That face tells me you really don't understand… now then.”

With her business here finished, Clan glanced behind Koutarou. And ever revealing a mischievous smile she turned her back to Koutarou.

“Since Pardomshiha is glaring at me with such a scary face, I think it's about time to leave.”

Upon hearing Clan's words, Koutarou looked behind him. There he saw Ruth giving Clan a serious glare.

Right. Though it's been months for me, it's only been a few days since the attack for Ruth-san…

Koutarou and Clan had spent a lot of time together. However, that had only been a few minutes for everyone else. Significantly more time would be required before Ruth would reconsider her current stance towards Clan. So Koutarou didn't stop Clan, and instead just said his parting words to her back.

“Bye, Clan. I'll call you later.”

“I don't want to hear anything more problematic.”

Clan threw a glance at Koutarou and lightly kicked off the ground. As she did, her body floated up towards the sky. The girl wearing a luxurious dress floating through the sky looked like a fairy.

“Of course it won't be anything like that, stupid.”

“Fufufu, then that's fine. Well then, this is farewell.”

After that Clan blended in with the blue morning sky, leaving behind a smile.

She had activated another one of her inventions, a device that concealed her appearance. Even though there weren't many people out early in the morning, a flying girl would stick out like a sore thumb. So Clan activated her device and returned to her spaceship.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

Part 1

February 8, Monday

Even after Clan had left, Ruth was still confused.

As a result, her training was wasted and she repeated her failures.

And that confusion continued as they headed towards Kitsushouharukaze high school, to the point that she neglected the classes and followed Koutarou with her eyes.

Koutarou was of course unaware of that, and when lunchtime came by, he care freely chatted with some classmates.

“So Satomi, how many do you think you'll get?”

“I'm in the same boat as you guys. Even if I got some, it'd be one or two obligation chocolates.”

As the second week of February had started, Valentine's Day was scheduled for the weekend. Since the 14th was a Sunday, chocolate would be handed out on the last day of school that week, Friday the 12th. Today was only Monday, but the entire school was bristling with talk of Valentine.

“You're still sitting sweet, Satomi. Your obligation chocolate is exceptional.”

“Huh? What's that supposed to mean?”

“Don't play stupid! Obligation chocolate from princess Alaia is on a completely different dimension from the rest! It's on the level of true love chocolate!”

“Sakuraba-senpai, huh… well, it's true that she is gentle and has a strong sense of obligation, but in the end it's just obligation chocolate. I can't go into details, but she's pretty popular.”

“It's princess Alaia after all… there would be a lot of competition for her…”

“It's but a fleeting dream…"

However, the unpopular boys alliance that Koutarou was a part of were grieving.

They had no girlfriends and weren't particularly good at anything, so it's not like they had any girl fans.

So to them, Valentine's Day was an uncomfortable holiday. Because of that, around this time of the year, they would gather around in the corner of the classroom and complain. In total there were eight of them, all of them sulking.

“And how do I put this… I want Sakuraba-senpai to get along with the person she really loves.”

“Ah, I know what you mean. It totally fits the role of princess Alaia!”

“So everyone's getting one or two obligation chocolates… we're all in the same situation, huh…”

“That traitor is absorbing all the true love chocolates after all.”

“Kuh… Mackenzie, that bastard…”

“Everything is his fault!”

“Did you hear? The other day he was walking around with a new girl.”

“What!?”

“Is that for real, Satomi!?”

The alliance would always end their sulking by complaining about Kenji.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

Kenji was attractive, good at sports, sensitive to fashion, considerate, gentle to girls and had good grades. Since he was active in the drama club, it was predicted that he would get a lot of true love chocolates this year as well. Thanks to that, the unpopular boys alliance would treat him with such envy that it was like he was an enemy from a past life.

This envious behavior was the exact reason for why they weren't popular with the girls, but the boys were too young to notice that.

“Hey, Kou! Don't come up with random crap again!”

At that moment, Kenji fiercely protested what Koutarou had said. This was nothing but trouble for him.

“That's an unsightly excuse, Mackenzie-kun.”

Koutarou put his hand on Kenji's shoulder and showed a mean grin.

“W-What?”

“I saw you coming out from a café by the station with a girl the day before yesterday, you know. What happened with the drama club girl you were so close to up until now?”

As Koutarou whispered that, Kenji's face turned pale and he hurriedly began coming up with excuses. Even the normally smart Kenji came off as desperate in this situation.

“That was just my junior from my middle school. I was just talking with her since it had been a while since we last met. It's not like anything suspicious happened.”

“I understand, I understand. Let's leave it at that, Mackenzie. This time of the year is hard on you after all…”

As Kenji panicked, Koutarou smiled at patted him on the shoulder repeatedly.

“So, how many have you fooled with that trick, Mackenzie?”

“You're wrong, that's not it at all!”

“You're a disgrace to all men!”

“How many true love chocolates are you planning on scooping up for yourself, you traitor!”

“That's not what I'm trying at all!”

The unpopular boys alliance unleashed a barrage of attacks on Kenji. Doing that would only earn them more scorn from the girls, but they were the unpopular boys alliance because they wouldn't notice that.

“…Serves you right.”

Koutarou had a satisfied look on his face and ate a potato chip. That taste was also satisfying.

This unhealthy stuff is the best…

Since Koutarou rarely had the chance to eat this, Koutarou had spent several days savoring the taste of his potato chips and cola.

That was when a slender arm reached out in front of Koutarou and naturally grabbed a few of the potato chips from the bag.

“Satomi-kun, I can make you some true love chocolate if you'd like.”

After finishing speaking, that person poured the potato chips into her mouth. And after swallowing them, she smiled at Koutarou.

“That is, if you pay for the cost of the material and labor.”

“No thank you. More importantly, don't eat my chips without asking, Aika-san.”

“My, it’s delicious… is it the limited winter special, Consommé taste? Maybe I'll buy some too.”

The name of the potato chips thief was Aika Maki. She was a classmate that had gotten friendly with Koutarou recently. She paid no heed to Koutarou's protests and reached out towards the potato chip bag once more.

“Ah, hey!?”

“Fufu.”

The amount of chips that Maki had gotten a hold of this time was far more compared to the first time. Koutarou tried to protest about that as well, but when he opened his mouth, Maki pressed the chips into his mouth and his words were replaced with a crunch.

“There's no need to be so stubborn. I'll make a splendid chocolate fitting of the cost.”

Since Maki had shoved most of the chips into Koutarou's mouth, the amount she had left wasn't very different from what she had taken before. Instead, Maki reached towards Koutarou's bottle of cola.

“Mmmh.”

Seeing that, Koutarou accidentally got some chips stuck in his throat. He had gotten surprised as Maki reached for the cola while he was swallowing. Unable to breathe, Koutarou repeatedly pounded his chest.

“Here you go, Satomi-kun.”

“Mhhmm.”

Maki handed the bottle over to Koutarou, and he took a mouthful. As he did, the chips that were stuck fell down into his stomach.

“Phew, I'm saved…”

“You're like a child, Satomi-kun.”

“Leave me be.”

“Fufu.”

After Koutarou had drunk from the cola, Maki took it from him and took a sip like it was her natural right. Seeing that, Koutarou wanted to complain, but since she had helped when he was choking, he let her do as she pleased.

“…Hey, Kou.”

Before he knew it, Kenji was looking at Koutarou. He had an expression that was half amazed, half angry.

“Hm?”

Koutarou couldn't understand what Kenji's expression was about and he tilted his head in confusion. The next moment, more chips were presented to him and he opened his mouth. As he did, Maki pushed the chips into his mouth.

“…No, it's nothing.”

“Ish that sho?”

But in the end, Kenji didn't say anything. Unaware of what Kenji wanted, Koutarou continued chewing on the chips and tilted his head once more. That was when Maki called out to him again.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

“So what will you do about the chocolate, Satomi-kun?”

“You really don't get it, Aika-san.”

Koutarou chewed on his chips while shaking his index finger left to right.

“What we want isn't the taste of chocolate or a nice design! The chocolate itself is unimportant! Isn't that right, everyone!”

Koutarou asserted himself and looked back at the unpopular boys alliance, expecting to hear their agreeing voices. What Koutarou wanted was true love chocolate, not chocolate of an equivalent design.

“Aika-san, make one for me!”

“Me too!”

However, the alliance felt differently than Koutarou and one after another they ordered chocolates from Maki.

“Welcome, welcome! Please pay up front!”

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

Maki put on her business smile and used the backside of the print out she had used in the previous lesson to accept orders.

“Ah, you idiots! Have you fallen this low!?”

“I'd rather have chocolate than my pride. Aika-san, please make one for me too.”

“I want three, and if possibly with different packaging.”

“In that case, two of them would cost extra.”

“I can deal with that. Don't worry about the cost.”

“Okay, with pleasure~!”

Maki's paid for true love chocolate was a big hit. She received 20 orders before long and they were still pouring in.

If they weren't going to get a true love chocolate through normal means, they'd rather pay Maki for it. They wanted to eat a gorgeous handmade chocolate and at least feel like they had gotten a real true love chocolate. That's just how much the unpopular boys alliance had been cornered.

“Y-You guys…”

“So, what about you, Kou?”

“I don't need any!”

“You should buy some. It might be your last chance, you know?”

“Shut it, Mackenzie! You don't understand how I feel!”

The serious and stubborn Koutarou couldn't find it in him to pay for a true love chocolate. And with Kenji grinning in front of him, that choice was flat out impossible.

“You're the one who doesn't understand though…”

“You're so stubborn… you'll only lose out like that, Satomi-kun.”

“Quiet you! Your business relies on the pure hearts of men!”

As a result, it looked like Koutarou would spend yet another lonely Valentine's Day.

Part 2

Koutarou continued speaking with his classmates with a loud voice. Meanwhile, Ruth was observing him while deep in thought.

Looking at him like this, he doesn't seem to have changed much from before…

Ruth came to that conclusion after staring at Koutarou since morning. Koutarou didn't seem to have changed much since he and Clan had vanished. He was cheerfully chatting with his classmates like always.

But there's no way there's no change…

However, some kind of change should have happened to Koutarou. If that wasn't the case, he wouldn't have gotten so skilled with the sword in such a short time, and his relationship with Clan wouldn't have changed.

Satomi-sama wouldn't tell me even when I asked him…

When Ruth had asked Koutarou before, she had only gotten a rough outline of what had happened, but no details whatsoever.

He and Clan had been sent to a different world and they had to work together to return. During that process, he and Clan had become friends.

That had been Koutarou's answer every time she had asked him. She wanted to hear more details, but he wouldn't tell her. In order for Koutarou to break his silence, she needed some kind of vital information. So Ruth had been observing Koutarou the entire day, looking for such information, but she hadn't found anything that fit the bill.

“Hey Ruth, did something happen between you and Koutarou?”

As Ruth was deep in thought, Sanae appeared in front of her, upside down. Being able to fly freely as a ghost, Sanae was resting in that position while facing Ruth.

“Kyaa!?”

Ruth had been surprised by the sudden event, but when she realized it was a familiar face she soon smiled.

“O-Oh, it was just you, Sanae-sama.”

“You've had this big wrinkle on your forehead and have been glaring at Koutarou since this morning, it’s as if you're trying to curse him to death. Did you get into a fight? Or are you pretending to be a stalker?”

Since Sanae could see spiritual energy, she was extra sensitive to the changes of emotions in people. Because of that, she had been the first to notice the doubts Ruth had towards Koutarou.

“Uhm…”

Ruth stumbled for an answer, but that was when she noticed that Sanae might be able to tell her what has changed with Koutarou. Since Sanae had noticed her doubts, there was at least a chance of it.

“It's not like we had a fight, but… I just felt like the atmosphere around Satomi-sama has changed a little.”

So Ruth carefully choose her words as she explained to Sanae. In response, Sanae turned around and looked at Koutarou.

“Oh, it's about that.”

“So you did notice it then?”

“Yeah.”

Sanae turned back around with a smile on her face. Like Ruth had suspected, Sanae had noticed the change in Koutarou.

“The feeling inside Koutarou has changed a little.”

“The feeling inside him?”

Ruth was perplexed by Sanae's explanation.

“Oh right, sorry. You know how I'm often sleeping inside of Koutarou, right?”

“Ah!”

That was enough to allow Ruth to understand what Sanae meant and she lightly clapped her hands.

Since Sanae didn't have a physical form, she could enter other people's bodies. Sanae's favorite body was Koutarou's, and she would often slip into his body to sleep. Ruth had stumbled upon that sight several times, and she quickly understood what Sanae was trying to say. The sight of Sanae's head and limbs sticking out of Koutarou's body wasn't something she would soon forget.

“It's still comfortable, but it feels wider than before.”

“Wider?”

“Yeah.”

Sanae nodded and spread her hands out in an attempt to express the size.

“Before, when I entered, it felt really narrow, but now it feels like there's room for several more.”

Based on Sanae's exaggerated gestures, that size seemed to be equivalent to room 106. It probably felt that Koutarou's insides had expanded from the size of the wardrobe to the size of room 106.

Satomi-sama's inside have gotten wider. I guess that means he's gotten more mentally mature, or that he has grown into a man of larger caliber…

That was how Ruth interpreted Sanae's explanation.

In the past, Koutarou's heart only had the room for one or two others. However, now there was room for many more. That meant that Koutarou had grown more tolerant and mature.

“That's right. You should sleep together with Koutarou too, Ruth.”

“N-No, I'm… You know I can't leave my own body.”

“Really? But it's so warm and pleasant.”

Entering Koutarou's body might give her the possibility to find new clues, so Sanae's suggestion was attractive to Ruth. But Ruth was unable to leave her own body. Since the only way she could do that was death, she had no choice but to give up.

That said, there seems to be no mistake that something big happened to Koutarou-sama and Clan-sama…

Thanks to Sanae, Ruth had learned that Koutarou's sword skills hadn't been the only things that had developed. And Ruth wasn't optimistic enough to believe that this had happened without reason. After her conversation with Sanae, Ruth's doubts towards Koutarou had grown deeper.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

Part 3

To the girl known as Sakuraba Harumi, this year's Valentine's Day held a special meaning. That was because this Valentine's Day was the first since she had experienced the feeling of love, which she had only read of in books in the past. Of course, this wasn't the first time Harumi tried her hand at making chocolate. She had made chocolate for her family and the children in the hospital every year. However, this had been the first year she had tried her hand at true love chocolate. So she was carefully proceeding to make sure she made no mistakes.

Aau, I should've started on preparations earlier!

Harumi stared at the mountain of candy on the desk in the clubroom and was secretly panicking. The clubroom was still cold as they were approaching the middle of February, but Harumi didn't have the time to freeze. As a result, not even her knitting was going very quickly.

Actually, Harumi hadn't realized that she had someone she wanted to give a true love chocolate to until very recently.

“Are you going to give Satomi-san your true love chocolate, Sakuraba-senpai?”

She hadn't realized that the situation she was in this year was different until Yurika had pointed that out. She had only planned on giving chocolate to her family and the children in the hospital this year as well.

Harumi didn't currently have the courage to confess to Koutarou. However, since the boundary between obligation and true love chocolate was so blurry, she could express her feelings to their fullest. Because of that, Harumi definitely wanted to give some chocolate to Koutarou, but she couldn't afford to fail. She was of course going to do her best, but she also wanted to make some chocolate that he would want. She didn't want to make him some chocolate out of self-satisfaction.

She had started researching Koutarou's tastes when it came to sweets. However, since she had only realized this the other day, her research hadn't progressed very far. And since she couldn't flat out ask what kind of chocolate he liked, she was now starting to panic.

“Right, right, the other day, that Mackenzie said this thing during work.”

Koutarou, who had been ardently knitting, stopped as he reached for the cup with freshly poured tea.

How about this time…

Harumi paid attention to Koutarou's hands. The knitting needles and knitting were on the desk. In his left hand was a cup of tea, and his right hand was reaching out towards the mountain of candy.

Here it is!

Harumi had waited for Koutarou to take that action, and she instinctively held her breath as she watched where the hand was heading.

“He wants you to appear in another play. It seems you were a big hit even with people outside of the school.”

Unaware of Harumi's intentions, Koutarou grabbed a snack and threw it into his mouth.

Another vote for milk chocolate.

Harumi made a mental note of every type of snack Koutarou ate. What he had eaten this time was a snack based on chocolate. Harumi had prepared the snacks, and on top of the rice crackers and potato chips, she had also carefully placed some chocolate based snacks as well.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

In total there were three kinds of chocolate snacks, each with a different coating. There was the sweet and easy to eat milk chocolate, the bitter chocolate which had no sugar or milk in it, and the bittersweet chocolate in between the two. This time Koutarou had taken one of the milk chocolate snacks.

Currently, it looks like Satomi-kun prefers milk chocolate…

Harumi had secretly been researching Koutarou's preferences like this since last week. Since she couldn't find it in her to ask him straight out she had taken to this roundabout method. If she only lined up the table with chocolate, she felt like she would be found out, so she put in various other candy as well. As a result, the research was taking a long time and Harumi was starting to panic.

Which means that I should use milk chocolate in a unique shape…

From her research, Harumi knew that Koutarou was extremely fond of shaped candy. When she had left candy she had shaped after molds using flour, water and syrup, Koutarou's eyes had sparkled and he had gone after those first. And based on her research up until today, she learned that Koutarou preferred milk chocolate.

And so Harumi began thinking of recipes in her head.

“Sakuraba-senpai, Sakuraba-senpai.”

As Harumi was looking up into the ceiling, thinking of recipes, Koutarou's face suddenly appeared.

“Y-Yes!?”

Shaken by Koutarou's sudden appearance, she raised her voice. Since it was completely unexpected, she jumped so far back into her chair that she almost fell over.

“W-What is it, uh, S-Satomi-kun?”

“Weren't you listening?”

“I-I'm sorry, I-I was just thinking of something else…”

Harumi tried to calm her beating heart and apologized to Koutarou in a fluster. She couldn't stand for it if Koutarou were to hate her for something like that.

“Kukuku, Ahahahaha!”

However, instead Koutarou began laughing. Harumi's panicked attempts at excuses were so cute and funny that he couldn't hold it in.

“S-Satomi-kun?”

Harumi was surprised by Koutarou's unexpected reaction. And that in turn was even funnier. Koutarou's sides were about to split with laughter.

“Wahahahahaha, w-what's with that face, Sakuraba-senpai? Hahahahaha!”

“Geez, Satomi-kun!”

“T-That's because, wahahaha, y-your face, your face is! Ahahaahahaha!”

Harumi quickly realized that Koutarou was laughing about her face, but by then it was already too late. Koutarou switched between laughing and gasping for breath.

“…Satomi-kun, you really are such a bully… geez…”

Harumi's angry face consisting of 50% embarrassment, 40% affection and 10% anger only made Koutarou laugh even more.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

Part 4

Meanwhile, while Koutarou was laughing like an idiot. Sanae and Yurika who had recently gotten along better were in the supermarket by the station.

“Wow, there's so much chocolate~”

“I hope there are some that would be useful~”

This supermarket was having a special sale for chocolate now that Valentine's Day was so close. With that as their goal, the two who never really went shopping had come here.

“Don't be so cheap. This is a once in a year festival.”

Sanae cheerfully looked over each and every one of the displayed chocolate. She was currently looking at the shelf that had lined up the relatively expensive products. Since she rarely used money, being a ghost and all, this was well within the range of something she could buy with the small allowance she got from Koutarou. The only time she might go over her allowance was when buying anime related merchandise. Because of that, she was planning on buying relatively expensive chocolate.

But if it's too expensive, Koutarou might not think it’s good, so something around here should do just fine…

Sanae had perused the most expensive chocolate, but in the end she changed her mind.

She was planning on giving Koutarou chocolate. And when he was eating it, she was planning on clinging onto his back and sharing his senses. So if she bought something that he was unused to, Koutarou might not find it as good, and that sensation wouldn't be transmitted to her. And since Sanae enjoyed being showered in the spiritual energy Koutarou emitted when he was happy, there was no reason to buy a needlessly expensive chocolate.

In the end, Sanae chose a little expensive Valentine's Day limited edition chocolate from a familiar maker.

'A refined version of the taste everyone knows, delivered to your special person.'

The words written on the product fit well with Sanae.

“But, but, even if I buy a more expensive chocolate, that won't fill the stomach any more.”

Unlike Sanae who headed for the most expensive products, Yurika headed for the low-priced commodities. They had split up, with Yurika headed for the right shelves and Sanae for the left shelves.

Yurika lived using the salary she was getting from Folsaria. However, with the strong yen, and with her salary docked to cover the repairs of the buildings she had destroyed in the past, she was forced to live a strict life. Despite that, she couldn't stop herself from buying Shoujo manga and she had almost no spare money. If she hadn't been allowed to live in room 106, she'd be the first homeless magical girl in history. As a result, Yurika ended up being drawn towards the right shelves.

Do I get ten 10 yen chocolates, two 50 yen chocolates or one 100 yen chocolate… Auu~, what should I do…?

Yurika was wondering how to use the 100 yen. Should she buy a bunch of cheap ones, or a single more expensive one, or somewhere in the middle? If she had been the one to eat it, she would definitely have chosen the cheapest chocolate, but if she was going to give it to Koutarou or someone else, she felt like too cheap would be bad. Troubled, she began thinking of several ways to spend her 100 yen, such as three 30 yen chocolates and four 10 yen chocolates.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

“…I hate this, I hate being poor…”

Since Yurika loved Shoujo manga, she adored Valentine's Day. She also wanted to give a boy she loved a large chocolate. However the distortion of the market principles and modern society didn't let her. Yurika grasped the 100 yen coin and ground her teeth.

“V-Valentine's Day should just perish…”

Yurika stared at the chocolate with tears in her eyes.

“Yurika, Yurika.”

That was when Sanae approached, holding onto her own chocolate.

“Fuee~”

When Yurika turned towards Sanae, she pointed behind Yurika.

“Isn't that the one you were talking about the other day?”

“Eh, what?”

Yurika looked where Sanae was pointing.

“Hwha!?”

Yurika froze.

'New Sale! Kanto seaweed soy sauce ramen! One bag for 78 yen.'

Behind her was the ramen that she had eagerly been waiting for, a new flavor of instant ramen.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

Part 5

While Sanae and Yurika where in the supermarket, another two people related to room 106 arrived. However, they weren't headed for the candy aisle, but a different one.

“Kiriha-san, over here.”

“Thank you Shizuka, you're a big help.”

Those two, Shizuka and Kiriha, were standing in the alcohol aisle. That said, their goal wasn't to drink it. What they were after was alcohol for use in cooking.

“There's no need for thanks, I'm going to buy something too.”

Shizuka had guided Kiriha to this super market's alcohol aisle. Shizuka had some alcohol she wanted to buy as well.

“Liqueur, Liqueur… ah, here it is.”

Shizuka was after liqueur used in cooking. She could buy normal alcohol for cooking in the alcohol store by the shopping district. However, Shizuka had to come all this way to buy liqueur used in making candy. In this supermarket, there was a corner for specialized cooking using alcohol, and there was a large selection of goods available. Shizuka picked up a yogurt liqueur. It was one of her favorite articles that only this store sold.

“Shizuka, what are you going to make with that?”

“Fufufu, I was actually planning on using it as a secret ingredient for my chocolate cake.”

“I see, a cake huh? That sounds delicious.”

Kiriha who was also skilled at cooking quickly picked up on Shizuka's intentions. She was going to make a sponge with yogurt liqueur mixed with it and cover it with chocolate. By doing that, the sponge would have a refreshing taste that would ease up the persistent taste of chocolate.

“Something like strawberry would go well with it too.”

“Aha, I have some strawberry liqueur at home, so I'll give it a try.”

The two continued to talk about cooking while moving a little to the side, which was where the alcohol Kiriha was after was located.

“Brandy for cooking is around here.”

“Now then, which one to pick…”

There wasn't just plenty of liqueur for cooking, but also plenty of brandy for cooking. Kiriha picked up a nearby brandy and read the label. She had to pick something that would work for what she was going to use it for.

“You'll be putting the brandy into the chocolate, right?”

“Yes. I wanted to give it a more mature taste.”

“So the chocolate will be bitter?”

“That's my plan.”

Kiriha was looking for a brandy to give the chocolate a more deep taste. All to make a chocolate with a more mature and less sweet taste.

Kiriha was planning on making a true love chocolate, so she wanted to make it so an adult would want to eat it. That's because Kiriha's first love that she met ten years ago should be around 30 years now.

However, she still hadn't found her first love. She had used various methods, and she would sometimes check places where she believed that person would be. But she still hadn't found him. Despite that, Kiriha couldn't keep herself from making a true love chocolate. That's because she was still in love with him.

Fufu, I'm sure Koutarou would laugh at me for being so stubborn…

Kiriha herself was aware that she was doing something stupid. However, right now she didn't feel like that was for nothing. She now had a best friend that would understand her. Even if she couldn't hand her true love chocolate to her first love, she could just laugh together with her best friend. And then they could just eat the chocolate together. Then nothing would be for naught. That was why Kiriha was excited for this year's Valentine's Day.

Kiriha smiled as she thought of that day. Then two small bottles of cooking brandy were presented to her.

“Then try this one or this one. Either you improve the bitterness or the chocolate or suppress it to make it easier to eat.”

“Hmm, which one to pick.”

Kiriha returned the bottle she was holding herself to the shelf and compared the two bottle Shizuka had brought her. Her cooking experience told her that either one of them would be good.

“Now that I think about…”

During that time, Kiriha's best friend flashed through her mind. After smiling once more, she decided which one to pick.

“Let's go with this one.”

Kiriha had picked the brandy that would make the chocolate easier to eat.

“Hmm… I thought you'd pick this one instead.”

Shizuka lightly shook the remaining dry brandy bottle. In Shizuka's mind, Kiriha was a very mature woman, so she believed that she'd want to make the chocolate even bitterer.

“I felt like it would be better if it was easier to eat when I share it with everyone.”

Kiriha's best friend had a very childish taste. Even if she dulled the bitterness, that best friend would probably make a funny face and say it's bitter. In that case, there was no need for her to go out of her way to make it bitterer. That would be for the best when she ate the chocolate with her friends.

“I see… now that I think about it, there are friends to share it with this year…”

Shizuka said that and showed a happy expression. It was a really happy expression, but at the same time a little sad.

“Oh yeah, your parents are…”

Shizuka had lost her parents and was managing Corona House on her own. Birthdays, Halloween, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day. While the world was celebrating all kinds of events, Shizuka had been all alone.

“Yeah. But this year I have everyone you know? That's why I'm so happy.”

However, Shizuka's life had completely changed since Koutarou moved in. She had now gotten people to spend those events with. She had spent all those events alone in her room, but that wasn't true any longer. If she walked down some stairs and opened a door, a lot of smiles would be waiting to greet her. That's why Shizuka was making a cake. To make the smiles in that room even more radiant.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

“While I can't say it openly… I feel the same way.”

Kiriha smiled and nodded. She was feeling something similar.

She had lost her mother early on and had felt lonely. And since she was the daughter of the clan's chief, she couldn't show others signs of weakness. So like Shizuka, she was happy to be able to see honest smiles every day.

“Fufufu, I'll be able to keep that a secret.”

“Please do. I have to think of my position after all.”

The two smiled at each other and began discussing chocolate again.

Their smiles, brighter than before, were proof that the friendship between them had grown.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

Part 6

As most of those related to room 106 were preparing for Valentine's Day, a single lone person turned her back towards the festivities.

“Hah…”

That person was sitting in the corner of room 106, holding her knees. And as she rested her chin on her knees, she would let out a sigh every now and then. Since she had turned her face down, her golden hair got in the way when trying to check up on her expression. However, it was clear that her expression wasn't as bright as her well taken care of golden hair.

Theiamillis Gre Forthorthe.

She was an alien girl who had crossed the vast universe to invade this small Japanese room.

“Why… why did it turn out like this…”

Theia's weak voice filled the room. Normally she was proud and powerful. Though her body may be small, she always had an impressive presence. But right now, that pride or power was nowhere to be seen. And her presence was even smaller than her tiny body.

The reason why Theia was depressed was because the worry that occupied her small chest was a very, very deep one.

“At first… I thought he was just a neanderthal…”

When Theia had first come to Earth, she had only thought of the people on earth as primitive barbarians. As a result, she would often clash with Koutarou and the other invaders, and they were far from having an amiable relationship.

However, as time passed as she and the other invaders vied for ownership of the room, everyone’s circumstances had touched her heart, and they had begun respecting each other. Before she knew it, she had started feeling happy about her life here.

Back on Forthorthe, Theia spent her life never letting her guard down and always remaining political. To her, the time she had spent in room 106 was irreplaceable.

And during those days, Theia had noticed that she had fallen in love with a young earthling. At first she had considered him to be nothing but a neanderthal, and had tried to use force to make him submit. They had brawled, fought and argued up until now. That might be true even now, as their fighting and arguing continued, but her reasons had completely changed.

It was fun being able to throw out her true feelings. She was happy to be treated as an equal. She had started to forget that she was princess.

Theia, and that person she felt for would still fight. However, Theia thought of it as skinship. Before she knew it, her hostile feelings had vanished, and she now only clashed to confirm her happiness and love.

“He's an alien… but why do I keep forgetting that… I knew that from the very beginning…”

However, now that she had realized her feelings, a problem had surfaced. It was the fact that she was an alien.

Even if he were to respond favorably to Theia's feelings, and the two were bonded, they were still born from two different planets. That would cause a lot of problems. On top of the problem of being different species, Theia's position was yet another one. And as she went through each and every problem, she understood just how unrealistic the entire thing was.

“He and I, will never be connected…”

She had fallen in love with someone whom she could never be together with.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

That was Theia's worry.

While it sounded simple when put into words, it wasn't a problem easily dealt with.

“Haha… this is what I get for getting carried away with 'Theiamillis's Blue Knight'… the Blue Knight could never be with the princess either…”

A dry laughter leaked from her lips as large tears fell down her cheeks.

In the past, Theia had secretly given the person she felt for the title of 'Theiamillis's Blue Knight.’

However, the Blue Knight of legend could never be together with the Silver Princess. The Silver Princess loved him, but he still left Forthorthe.

And like the legends, Theia could never be together with her Blue Knight. That was all she could think of right now.

Having been in a master/servant relationship for a long time, Ruth had already realized that something was wrong with Theia.

Lately her highness has been acting strange… Is she struggling with another problem? I wonder…

However, Ruth hadn't realized the cause of it. Since Theia and Koutarou's relationship had improved during the ski trip, she couldn't imagine that a problem would have surfaced regarding the two. Unfortunately, Theia's worry was in a blind spot for Ruth.

That said, if it's not about Satomi-sama, it might be unnecessary to worry too much. For starters, I should start by giving her this to cheer her up…

Ruth had started preparations to make chocolate for Theia's sake.

Upon learning of Valentine's Day, she definitely wanted Theia to participate. She believed that if Theia were to give the person she felt for some chocolate, her awkward master would be able to express her gratitude and love, and her relationship might develop further. She was also hoping that the process of that would cheer up the depressed looking princess.

No, maybe I should be more worried about Satomi-sama…

Ruth was certain that Koutarou was hiding something. As a result, she wasn't sure what he would do if that something was brought to the surface. Ruth's intuition, or rather her wish, told her that there was no way that Koutarou would become Theia's enemy. However, it wouldn't be good if things developed in a strange direction. She also had to worry about Clan bringing Koutarou to her side. She didn't want to let go off an ally as trustworthy as Koutarou. She needed him to protect Theia alongside her. That's why she felt like Theia needed to actively take part in events that would improve her relationship with Koutarou.

Because of that, Ruth was bringing a paper bag full of material and tools to the kitchen onboard the Blue Knight. Since she wanted to keep Theia's chocolate making a secret until the day, she couldn't do it in room 106.

The bag Ruth was carrying was heavy; when she lifted it off the kitchen counter, the metallic bowl and apparatus collided and made loud sounds. However, Ruth's steps were light and it certainly didn't look like the bag was very heavy. After leaving the kitchen counter, she put her finger on her chin and started thinking.

“All that's left is to bring her highness with me… but I guess it would be best to do that after dinner.”

After dinner, they would be holding their normal games for control of room 106. Since that took some time, if they were going to make chocolate, it would be best to do so after the games.

Everyone's Chocolate Circumstances

“What should I make for tonight… Fufu, I guess I should make something plain and prepare for her highness's chocolate this weekend…”

Ruth imagined Koutarou eating tonight’s dinner. She loved seeing Koutarou enjoying her meals, especially when he couldn't stop eating. She also loved seeing Theia eat, but for a different reason, so Ruth would always do her best when it came to cooking.

“If I cook a steamed chicken, the texture and taste should be great, then I can focus on the calories and—”

As Ruth was walking down the hallway leading to the inner room, the bracelet on her right arm began to slightly vibrate.

“Oh?”

That was the signal that the bracelet had received information. Ruth brought the bracelet to her face and accessed the information that had been delivered.

“…A hyperspace communication from Pardomshiha?”

Seeing what was displayed on the bracelet, Ruth tilted her head in confusion.

That meant that Ruth had received a message from her family.

The Problem of a Noble

Part 1

February 8, Monday

In Corona House's room 106, games were always played after dinner. Points were distributed based on the outcome of those games. These points represented the ownership of the room, and the person who collected all the points would be declared as the ruler of the room. In other words, this was a peaceful invasion.

There were all kinds of games used in this invasion. They would use card games, party games, and sometimes console games. Since everyone had their own strengths and weaknesses, Koutarou and the invading girls decided on taking turns in choosing. As a result, the point change was gradual and even now, ten months after they had started, they still hadn't reached a conclusion.

However, a certain person's points were gradually decreasing, maybe because of her own nature.

Nijino Yurika; just the other day, her position as a magical girl had finally been established. She was the second invader.

Games that required planning or intelligence were Yurika's weak point. Her thinking was shallow and it would quickly show on her face. As a result, she had barely won any games that required tactics. Though she had improved since the start, since Koutarou and the others were aware of her personality, her win rate hadn't improved. Recently, she had been making a comeback through games relying on luck. If she hadn't, she would have 0 points by now.

“Fufufu, I'll be alright with this~”

Having realized the crisis she was in, starting with the board game today, Yurika was going to put a certain plan into action.

Games relying on luck were working for her so far, but there was no guarantee that that would continue. So Yurika wanted to improve her win rate for games relying on tactics.

“Now, let's play!”

Because of that, Yurika was leaning forwards on the tea table, eagerly waiting for the game to start.

“…Yurika, are you really satisfied… with that purchase?”

“Koutarou's right, Yurika! That's not something a magical girl should do! Love Love Heart would never do that!”

“Ho-! Are you planning on robbing a bank like that, Yurika-chan Ho-?”

“Korama, apparently there are no banks in this game Ho-!”

However, Yurika's plan wasn't very popular with the residents of room 106.

“What's so strange about this!? It's a perfect plan!”

Yurika's magical girl outfit fluttered as she objected. She had absolute confidence in today’s plan.

The reason for her losses was because in games of tactics, her face would give it all away.

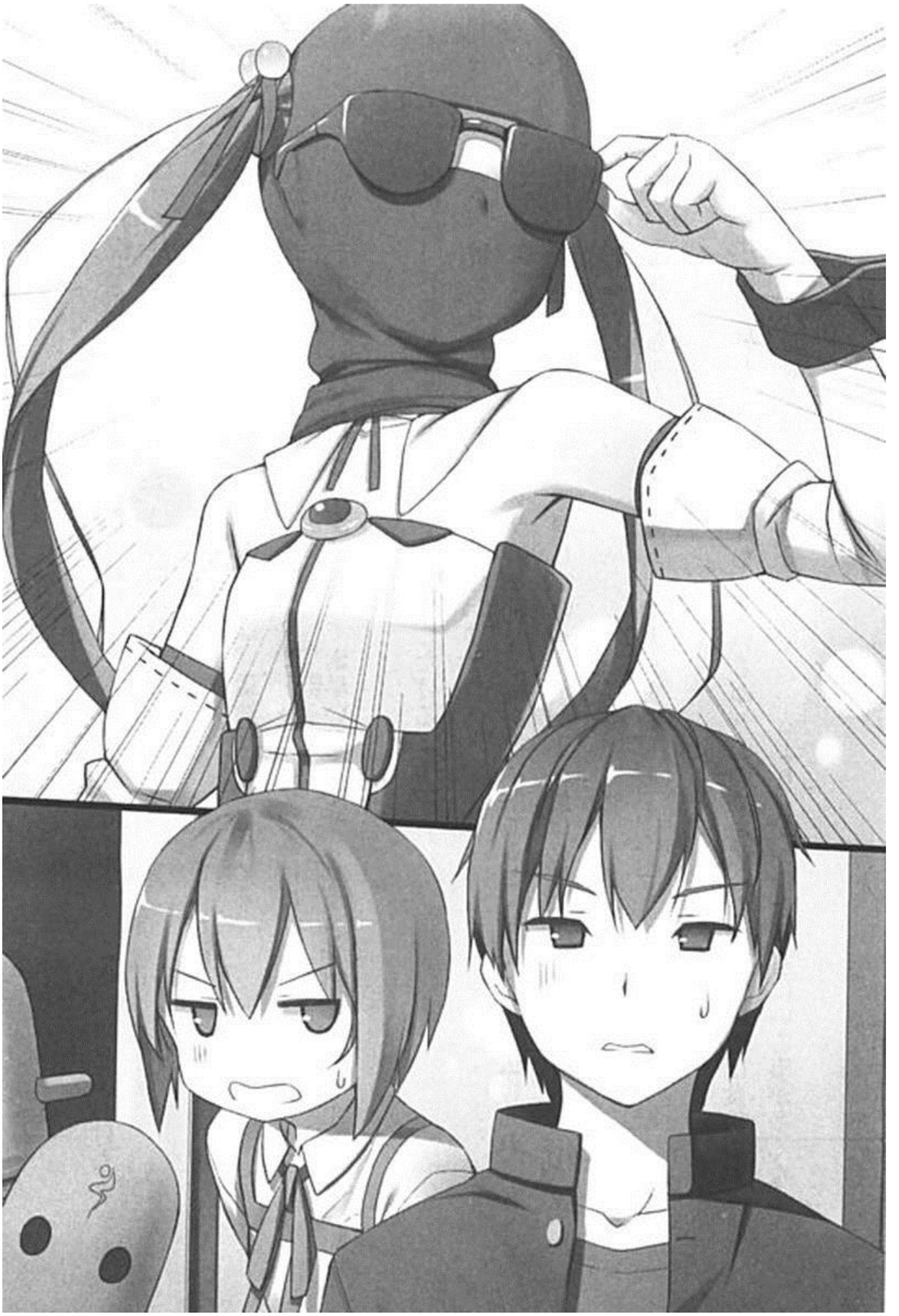
With that in mind, Yurika was wearing a ski mask and shades to hide her face.

“I-I got it!”

The Problem of a Noble

Yurika raised her voice and slammed her hands into the tea table.

The Problem of a Noble



The Problem of a Noble

“You're only saying that because you're scared I'll take all your points, aren't you!?”

The ski mask and shades worked, as it was impossible to see what kind of expression Yurika was making right now. Of course, they could still imagine what expression she had.

“…Yurika…”

Seeing Yurika like that was painful, and Koutarou called out to her with a gentle voice and an expression full of pity.

“Yurika, if you want points that badly, I'll give you some. Would 20 points be a good start?”

Koutarou picked up a pen and altered the score sheet on the wall. He docked 20 points from himself and added them to Yurika's total.

“Hueh?”

Koutarou's unexpected action made Yurika's voice falter. Her face was probably in a similar state as her voice, but the ski mask and shades worked excellently.

“I'll change the game into something easier for you to win too.”

Koutarou was in charge of picking today’s game. He was planning on changing the game into a card game to make it easier for Yurika to win.

“So please, take that off Yurika! You're fine as just a magical girl! You don't need to wear such an odd outfit even if it’s to win!”

“Well said, Koutarou! A man should be worried about methods used to win!”

“Even I would shy away from defeating that.”

“…That's true.”

He could understand Yurika wearing her magical girl outfit to motivate herself and the ski mask and shades to hide her face. But the sight was just so bizarre.

Also, Koutarou was confident that the outcome wouldn't change, regardless of Yurika's outfit. Half a year ago might have been different, but now they understood Yurika well enough that they could tell how she was feeling regardless of what she was wearing. That's just how much time they had spent together.

Yurika would lose even in that outfit. And she would then jump into the wardrobe to cry, while suppressing her voice. She shouldn't have bought a ski mask and sunglasses; she should've just settled for instant ramen.

Imagining that was just too painful for Koutarou that he couldn't leave her be, because she was his precious friend.

“Y-You're making a fool out of me!”

Having realized Koutarou's intentions, Yurika began to fiercely object.

“I'll make you regret that later!”

However, even though Yurika said that, she quickly removed her ski mask and shades.

“Yurika, if you're not satisfied you can return Koutarou's points.”

“Nope, I'll keep whatever I'm given♪”

Yurika cheerfully threw away the ski mask and shades and picked up the game board from the tea table and returned it to its box. The board game was no longer needed as the game was being changed into something else.

The Problem of a Noble

“…Will Yurika-chan be okay with her life like that…”

Shizuka sipped on her tea as she watched Yurika cheerfully clean up the game. Recently, she would spend more time in room 106 than in her own room.

“To me, Yurika looks like she would be able to survive such a rough life, despite her appearance.”

Kiriha took a sip of her own tea and smiled at Shizuka.

“She'll probably be fine as long as someone like Satomi-kun is nearby.”

“…You've got a lot of hard work ahead of yourself, Satomi Koutarou.”

Shizuka and Kiriha believed Yurika's life would remain somewhat stable as long as Koutarou was around, since he couldn't find it in himself to abandon her. Or rather, they hoped it would remain stable; they didn't want Koutarou to abandon Yurika.

“Satomi-kun might just get together with someone like Yurika-chan.”

“That's certainly possible. Satomi Koutarou is the kind of guy who would draw the short straw on purpose.”

Yurika would probably suffer if someone like Koutarou wasn't by her side. She would be incapable of living even a normal life. That's what Kiriha and Shizuka believed, and they looked at each other and smiled.

“So what are we doing today, Koutarou?”

“If we play the old maid, even Yurika should have a chance.”

“But, Yurika doesn't have a poker face.”

“I'll sit next to her, and pick cards without looking at her face. So Yurika, I told you to stop with that!”

“Eeeehhh~~~~?”

Upon hearing that the game would be old maid, Yurika had put her hands on the ski mask and shades, but she reluctantly let go upon Koutarou's strong objection.

“Then make sure you pick the bad card, Satomi-san.”

Yurika was dissatisfied as her equipment would be useful for the old maid, so she threw her anger at Koutarou.

“Don't push your luck. I don't have to go that far.”

“Come on, there's no need to be so shy, Satomi-san. I know you actually love me~”

“You really should look over that personality of yours…”

Koutarou had decided to change today’s game to old maid, Koutarou was able to do that since it was his turn to pick a game. But since it was so sudden, he decided to check with the other two.

“Kiriha-san, Theia, are you fine with the game changing to old maid?”

“Yes. Just do as you please.”

Kiriha sipped on her second helping of tea and nodded her head. Her goal was to keep the battle for room 106 at a standstill to keep the other underground people from getting out of hand. Yurika losing was of course out of the question, so she had no objection.

“In return, I desire the sweet jelly you've hidden in the back of the cupboard.”

However, just letting the game change wasn't very fun. So Kiriha struck a deal with Koutarou.

The Problem of a Noble

“Ah, that's what I was planning on eating in secret!”

“That's why I'm requesting it.”

The sudden situation made Koutarou panic, and upon seeing that, Kiriha smiled. It was a little prank she had pulled on her best friend. The truth was that Kiriha wasn't particularly interested in the sweet jelly. She just wanted to see Koutarou panic.

“Sweet jelly!? What flavor!?”

“This is the first I've heard of any sweet jelly, Satomi-san!”

If anything, Sanae and Yurika were the ones who wanted to eat it. Sanae who wanted to eat delicious stuff and Yurika who wanted to eat anything; upon hearing the words sweet jelly, their eyes began sparkling as they sidled up to Koutarou.

This is why I kept it quiet…

Koutarou held his head and smiled wryly, and reluctantly accepted Kiriha's deal.

“…Okay, okay, just eat all you want.”

Koutarou had prepared the sweet jelly to cheer himself up in the case that he didn't get any chocolate for Valentine's Day. However, he couldn't say no to the two in front of him in this scenario.

“Alright! You're so generous, Koutarou! What a man!”

“That’s one meal! Thank you very much, Satomi-san!”

“Fufufu, Karama, Korama.”

“Okay Ho-!”

“Leave it to us Ho-!”

With the sweet jelly set as the price for changing the game to old maid, the two haniwas ran towards the kitchen. Seeing them off, Koutarou turned towards Theia who was sitting on the opposite side of the table from Kiriha.

“What about you, Theia?”

“…”

However, there was no response from her. She would always be the first to react, so this response was strange.

“Hey, Theia.”

Koutarou waved his hand in front of her.

“Kyaa!?”

That surprised Theia and she jumped back a little and fell down on her butt. She supported her body with her hands and looked up at Koutarou with a blank gaze.

“W-What…?”

“What… Well I changed today’s game so I wanted to hear your opinion but… is something wrong?”

Seeing her weak appearance, Koutarou began worrying as it wasn't like her.

Is she feeling ill or something?

Theia had shown a dark expression like that before the ski trip as well. She had smiled during the school trip, but now she had returned to this.

The Problem of a Noble

The only reason he could think of would be problems related to the rights of the throne, but Clan who might be the cause of any such problems no longer had any reason to attack Theia. Clan had even offered to give up her rights to the throne in order to return Signaltin to the royal families.

The next thing Koutarou could think of was that she might be sick.

“N-no, it's nothing, nothing at all…”

Theia shook her head and turned her face down to escape Koutarou's glance.

Or maybe I did something to upset her…

If there were problems or if she was sick, there was no need for her to look away. Theia would always look straight at people. So there was the possibility that Koutarou himself had done something without knowing it.

“You have the right to select today’s game. Do as you please.”

“Yeah…”

Theia answered Koutarou without looking back up at him. However, Koutarou had begun worrying more about her than her answer.

That's right, Ruth-san might know something…

Ruth knew more about Theia than anyone else. She might be able to give Koutarou a hint. Koutarou looked at Ruth who was sitting next to Theia.

“…”

However, Ruth too was looking down and was seemingly in deep thought. Her expression was serious and it was quite clear that she was mulling over something.

I wonder what's up with those two. I guess I'll ask them later…

Their behavior bothered Koutarou, but he couldn't check up on them in front of everyone. It might be something related to Forthorthe after all.

“Alright, then let's start today’s game.”

So Koutarou decided to start the game. It was more convenient to check up on them when they were finished.

Part 2

Today's old maid was held five times, and Kiriha who remained calm throughout the entire game gathered the most points. Following her was Sanae, Koutarou, Theia and Yurika.

Despite being so enthusiastic about it, Yurika had lost many points. She couldn't even win against Theia, whose head was in the clouds.

"I really should have used the ski mask and sunglasses…"

"Isn't it fine? You only lost all the points Koutarou gave you."

"That's true~, but if only I had hid my face and eyes I might have been able to keep some of my points~"

"…I don't think you would have had any left even then…"

"Uhhh."

Yurika cried bitter tears, having lost every game while Sanae updated the points on the score sheet on the wall. However, as she was doing that, she thought of something and stopped her hand.

"That's right, Koutarou, Koutarou."

"Yeah?"

"I'll give you some of my points."

As Sanae said that she swung the pen in her hand around like a magical stick. She looked more like a magical girl than Yurika ever did as she floated in the air.

"Why?"

"I took half of the 20 points you gave to Yurika."

"Don't worry. I still have points to spare."

Koutarou's goal was no longer to gain control of the room. It had now changed to resolving the problems that the invader girls had. Because of that, he didn't want anyone to lose. That had been the primary reason for Koutarou giving Yurika points, so there was no need for Sanae to give him the points back.

"It's okay. I'm winning today, and besides I'm striving to become the perfect woman♪"

"What's with that all of a sudden?"

However, Sanae ignored Koutarou's intentions and rewrote his points. She subtracted ten points from her total and added them to Koutarou's.

Fufufu, if Koutarou's going to be the perfect man, then I'll be the perfect woman. I'll become a grand guardian spirit that you'll be happy to have protecting you♪

Sanae no longer thought of Koutarou as an enemy she had a truce with. She either considered Koutarou to be her close friend, or an older brother she admired. She didn't want him to lose, and since she respected him she wanted to copy him. Those feelings led to her giving Koutarou points.

"Thank you, Sanae."

"There is no need for thanks. Consider it a warrior's mercy. Hohoho."

Hearing Sanae's cheerful laugh, Koutarou decided to let her do as she pleased.

And if Sanae looks like she's about to lose, I can just give her the points back…

The Problem of a Noble

Koutarou knew that Sanae was admiring him, so he decided to accept her goodwill. And since Koutarou and Sanae were cooperating, she wasn't going be at a disadvantage with the points moving over to Koutarou. The points moving was only superficial.

More importantly…

With the games over for now, Koutarou recalled what he was supposed to do.

"…"

And that was to do something about Theia who was still looking down, thinking about something.

First, I need to take Ruth-san to the side and ask her.

Koutarou made up his mind and shifted his glance from Theia to Ruth who was behind her.

Ruth was also silently looking down. Seeing that it wasn't just Theia but Ruth as well made Koutarou quite anxious. To him, Theia should have an imposing expression, and Ruth a calming one.

"Ru—"

"Satomi-sama."

And in the exact moment Koutarou was about to call out to Ruth, she spoke his name. Before he knew it, she had raised her head and stared straight at him.

"Yes?"

Slightly surprised, Koutarou looked back at Ruth. She was looking at him with a serious expression. Her hands were clenched and resting on top of her knees. It was an appearance that showed great determination.

"…There is something I want to ask you about…"

"I don't mind."

When Koutarou nodded, Ruth let out a slight sigh of relief.

Could it be that… Theia is in a really bad state?

Koutarou could sense the danger Theia was in from Ruth's behavior.

"…Then…"

Ruth took a deep breath and began to explain.

The Problem of a Noble

Part 3

Just a while ago a long distance message had reached the Blue Knight. That message came from Forthorthe, and the senders were Ruth's parents.

The message was a video letter from her parents. In it they asked Ruth about her work and her health. Having seen her parents' cheerful appearance after quite a while, Ruth felt herself getting more cheerful as well. Until she heard what was casually mentioned at the end of the video letter.

"Right, right, we were originally going to be pushing for this once you returned to Forthorthe, but… your arranged marriage has been decided."

"Eh?"

That was a surprise attack from a completely unexpected direction for Ruth. She literally doubted her ears.

"The other party is really enthusiastic about it. Even though you're in the middle of her highness's trial, he wants to meet you."

Ruth's father, Lord Pardomshiha, had secretly been proceeding with Ruth's marriage interviews. The other party was the heir of a powerful company with connections to the science industry. Though he was a civilian, he was related to the distinguished Melcemheim family.

There were no problems with this person marrying Ruth.

Not only was he related to the Melcemheim family, but he himself was also competent. He had taken over after his father a few years ago and was now, at his young age, at the top of the company. After that, achievements had come at a brisk pace, and the company had grown rapidly. He was also a well-known philanthropist that had donated an enormous amount of money through the company.

If he and Ruth were to get married, Pardomshiha's influence would increase and they would be able to protect Theia even better.

With this, Pardomshiha would be able to strengthen their ties with the Melcemheim family. The Melcemheim family had strong ties with a different family than the Mastir family that Theia belonged too. If this marriage went through, they could start influencing that. This would be a highly important political marriage. Of course, the other party's powerful finances would also become a great power. And since he was a well-known philanthropist, he would be a big ally when it came to swaying public opinion.

Using those powers, Ruth would be able to protect Theia. This marriage was optimal for Ruth. And the same was true for the loyal Pardomshiha family.

That's why Ruth's parents hadn't objected when the other party wanted to hurry along the marriage. In fact, they welcomed it and sent Ruth that video letter.

The Problem of a Noble

Part 4

Ruth's story wasn't about Theia, like Koutarou had hoped, but it still surprised everyone that listened to it.

“An arranged marriage… is that true?”

Theia was no exception to this, and she stared at her long loyal subject with her eyes wide open. Her surprise was so deep that she temporarily forgot about her own worry.

“…Yes, your highness.”

Ruth slowly but firmly nodded at Theia. Her expression was dark. She didn't seem to be welcoming the idea of the arranged marriage; instead, her expression was filled with doubt.

“So, what are you planning on doing?”

Ruth hesitated to answer to Theia's question, then she honestly spoke her mind.

“That's… I'm honestly still hesitant. I understand that this marriage is better for the future, but…”

Ruth was well aware of the situation and just how much it would help Theia. She was also aware of the consequences if she were to decline.

Ruth was born into a well-known family of knights, so she knew that she wouldn't be able to marry freely and that she would eventually have to marry someone she didn't known for the sake of the family.

That's why she wanted Koutarou to become Theia's vassal. If Ruth were to get married, she would gain more power, but she wouldn't be able to always stay by Theia's side like now. When that happened, Koutarou would be of great help. If he stayed by Theia's side, then Ruth could marry without worrying.

“But, I, can't just make up my mind… so, I wanted to hear Satomi-sama's and everyone’s opinion…”

However, despite knowing all of that, Ruth wasn't very positive about the marriage. If anything, she was feeling reluctant. The reason for that was simple: a single man had already taken up residence in her heart.

“So… everyone, what do you think?”

Ruth finished explained everything she had to. Everyone here understood her situation. Now was their turn to tell Ruth what she wanted to know.

“Hmm… isn't it still too early?”

Shizuka was the first to answer. She counted their ages on her finger and shook her head.

“You're still in your first year of high school, 15 or 16 years old. I think it's too early for you to decide on your future.”

That was her thinking as an earthling, but Shizuka didn't think that it was much different in Forthorthe. And that was true; even in Forthorthe, it was rare for girls of Ruth's age to get married.

“I would agree, on certain conditions.”

“Eeeh? Why's that, Kiriha-san? It's definitely too early!”

Kiriha was for marriage. Hearing that, Shizuka was surprised and asked her why.

“If Ruth gets married, the situation regarding Theia-dono would change. And it might even be beneficial for Ruth herself.”

The Problem of a Noble

Kiriha's opinion was from a political point of view. If the merits were large, there was no reason not to.

“So you're telling her to compromise and get married? That's just awful! What about Ruth-san's feelings!?”

Shizuka's opinion was that of a woman’s. Ruth was still young, and her feelings weren't taken into consideration. She couldn't accept Kiriha's words.

“Don't get too heated, Shizuka. That's why I said only on certain conditions.”

Shizuka's pressed on in excitement while Kiriha attempted to calm her down.

“…Then what do you mean?”

Upon seeing Kiriha's wry smile, Shizuka was able to calm down a little. But it's not like she was convinced, and her eyes were still full of questions.

“If Ruth were to get married to someone she doesn't like, her mental burden would only increase. If the total results in a minus, there's no point.”

A while ago, Kiriha's father had also suggested that she get married. It was an entirely political marriage intended to suppress the radical faction. However, Kiriha had refused. The reason for that was because she already had a man she loved. So she gave Ruth that same choice. No matter how great of a power she gained, Kiriha wouldn't recommend marriage if Ruth was going to regret it. In the end, looking at the bigger picture, Kiriha was of the same mind as Shizuka.

“So what about the guy? Is he good looking or not?”

Yurika had a completely different point of view. The man was a rich heir, and although he wasn't a noble, he had the lineage. As long as he was good looking, he was the perfect fiancé, like out of a Shoujo manga. Because of that, Yurika's eyes were sparkling. Her being poor probably also played a part in the whole.

“Yurika, we're not talking about liking his face, geez…”

“Eeeh, really?”

“Well, in your Shoujo mangas, there's usually not a problem with a good looking guy's personality. But reality is not the same, you know?”

Sanae had a completely amazed expression, she couldn't keep up with Yurika's outlook on men. To Sanae, the face wasn't what was important, nor was it money or status. No, to her the most important thing was the other party's heart, or more accurately, the soul.

To a ghost like Sanae, good looks weren't all that important. If anything, she perceived more spiritual energy than light, so the emitted spiritual energy was more preferred. Sanae hated negative spiritual energy; when showered by spiritual energy colored by greed, she felt unpleasant. If anything, she loves straightforward spiritual energy. And to a ghost, money and status meant nothing.

So for these quite realistic reasons, Sanae valued a person's heart or soul more.

“Who would you pick between a good looking but sly guy or Koutarou? I'd rather go with Koutarou. He feels good to sleep in after all.”

“Wait a minute Sanae! So what!? You mean I'm ugly!?”

“What about you Yurika?”

“Don't ignore me!”

“Uhm, who would give me food?”

The Problem of a Noble

“A sly person wouldn't give you food for no reason. But Koutarou always gives you your fill, right?”

“Then I'll pick Satomi-san! I don't need a handsome man who doesn't give me food!”

“No really, what's that supposed to mean!?”

At first, Sanae and Yurika's taste in men had differed, but now they had agreed on a realistic part. 'A non-sly person' equals 'a person that gives you food.’ To Yurika, good looks came second to food. While Yurika liked to dream, because she was poor, she was forced to be a realist.

“It doesn't matter how good they look if they don't give me food. In that case I'd rather pick Satomi-san.”

“You did it Koutarou, you're super popular!”

“Y-You guys…”

Koutarou had been told in a roundabout way that he wasn't good looking. He himself was aware of that, but they were words that still pierced his heart.

“Isn't it okay, Koutarou? You're winning when it comes to the inside.”

“…That's quite convincing from someone who only has an inside.”

Those words was the only counter attack Koutarou could make.

“Ufufufufu~, I'm currently an adorable ghost, but who knows, I might have been ugly when I was alive.”

“That doesn't matter.”

“Ahaha, so you do get it, Koutarou.”

Sanae smiled happily and looked towards Ruth.

“…So Ruth, what's that fiancé actually like?”

And so the derailed topic returned to Ruth.

“That's true, in the end it comes down to that.”

“That's what I want to hear too. There's nothing sadder than being forced to marry someone you don't love after all.”

Shizuka and Kiriha agreed to what Sanae had said. The interest of the girls of room 106 gathered on whether or not the fiancé was Ruth's type or not.

“I hear he's a very wonderful person, but since I have never met him, I can't tell you anything else.”

As Ruth said that, she shook her head.

Ruth knew that the other party was the top of a famous corporation, and she also knew that he was a well-known philanthropist. However, that was all she really knew about him, as she hadn't directly met him.

“Apparently, he will be paying a visit here, so until then, I can't say for sure…”

“Hmm. So unless you have a reason not to, you'll at least have to meet him.”

A reason not to.

The moment she heard those words, Ruth's heart skipped a beat and she instinctively looked at Koutarou. That Koutarou had his chin resting on his palm, thinking of something, while looking at Ruth with a serious expression.

The Problem of a Noble

“So, uhm… what do you think, Satomi-sama?”

Ruth asked for Koutarou's opinion as if asking for help. The truth was, Ruth was most interested in his opinion. That's because the man that had taken residence in her heart was Koutarou. In other words, Koutarou was that reason not to, that Sanae had mentioned.

To Ruth, Theia was her master whom she held in high esteem, and at the same time she was a precious childhood friend she thought of like her own sister. She was fine with troubles in her own love life, but even the slightest hitch in Theia's would be a disaster.

And Koutarou was the first person that Ruth felt like she could entrust Theia to. That meant that he met all the requirements as a love interest. She could leave Theia to him since he was her ideal man.

Ruth had never revealed this to Koutarou, as she didn't want to become an obstacle between Koutarou and Theia's relationship. But in this situation, she wanted to hear Koutarou's opinion, no matter what. Those were her feelings as a woman that had leaked through.

“I…”

Koutarou was hesitant. All kinds of topics ran through his head. With so many experiences, he had a lot to take into account.

Satomi-sama…

And Ruth watched over Koutarou, as if praying.

One word was enough. One word was all Ruth needed.

She didn't care for the reason, she just wanted Koutarou to tell her to stop the arranged marriage. That alone was reason for Ruth to stop it.

If Satomi-sama says to stop it, than that is all I need…

Ruth knew that her own feelings would never reach him. That's because she needed Koutarou to protect Theia. If all went as Ruth hoped for, Koutarou would become Theia's partner. So either way, she and he would never be together. But even that didn't bother her. She was satisfied if the two of them could watch over Theia together. She was fine with that kind of love.

However.

Ruth prayed that Koutarou would at least value her a little. That was enough for her. That they would always be able to stay together. That was Ruth's ego, but it was far too small to call egoism. It was more of a small wish.

“…I have nothing to say.”

However, Ruth's wish didn't reach him.

In the end, Koutarou didn't tell Ruth to stop her arranged marriage.

Part 5

The moment she heard Koutarou's answer, tears flooded through Ruth's eyes.

“Satomi-sama…”

What was overflowing wasn't just her tears, but also a horribly sadness from the bottom of her heart. She felt that the sadness would crush her if she remained still.

“…I-I'm sorry, let me think on my own for a moment.”

So Ruth ran from the room. She didn't want to show him her crying appearance. Those feelings moved her legs. Her pride told her not to become a burden to Koutarou.

“Ruth!”

Theia stood up as Ruth had burst out from the front door.

“Ruth, wait! Where are you going!?”

Just like how Ruth treasured Theia, Theia also treasured Ruth. Theia had never seen Ruth run away like this before. That’s why she knew just how big of a shock this had been to Ruth. And so she didn't hesitate to chase after her childhood friend whom she thought of as an older sister through the darkness of the night.

After Ruth and Theia had run out, silence filled room 106. That had been because of their surprise, but as time passed, that surprise began to change into understanding.

“Satomi-kun! Why'd you have to put it like that!?”

Shizuka was the one to break the silence. Shizuka's face was contorted with anger. Her anger this time around was the same type of anger as when the invading girls had fought in room 106. And she threw her intense anger straight at Koutarou.

“…Landlord-san.”

“Don't give me that! You understood that Ruth-san wanted you to stop her, isn't that right, Satomi-kun!?”

“Yes.”

Despite Shizuka's burning rage, Koutarou remained calm. He nodded with the serious expression he had shown before.

I'm sorry, Ruth-san…

He looked towards the front door that had Ruth had run through and apologized in his mind. Regardless of his reasons, he had made her cry.

I know that there's also the matter with Theia, but…

Like Shizuka said, Koutarou understood Ruth's intentions. If that hadn't been the case, she wouldn't have asked him. And that she wanted him to object.

Koutarou believed that Ruth didn't ask him because he was a trusted friend, but because it had something to do with her asking him to serve Theia. If Ruth were to get married, the meaning and necessity of Koutarou serving Theia would greatly change. So Koutarou not speaking his mind here might have made Ruth feel like he was rejecting to serve Theia as well. That Ruth's trust and wishes hadn't reached him.

It's not like Koutarou understood all of Ruth's feelings. However, he had understood them, but despite that he couldn't respond to her.

“Then why!? If you knew, then why did you say something that sounded like you were pushing her away!?”

Shizuka was really angry. She had felt like every day was really fun ever since she started visiting room 106 daily. And she believed that Ruth felt the same way. That's why she couldn't forgive Koutarou's cold words. That's why she was just as angry now as she was when the invading girls had damaged her parents’ heritage. Shizuka now loved the invading girls as much as she did Corona House.

“…”

Koutarou couldn't say anything back to Shizuka.

Although it may just have been a part, Koutarou had understood Ruth's feelings, but despite that he hadn't said anything. As a result, he had hurt Ruth more than he had thought, but he didn't regret speaking those words.

And so he decided to accept Shizuka's criticism. Although he might not have had any other way to answer, the truth of the matter was that he had hurt Ruth.

“Don't be so harsh on Koutarou, Shizuka.”

Kiriha was the one to reach out to Koutarou. Despite her calm gaze, she had a sad expression. Since Kiriha was sensitive to other’s feelings, she understood Ruth, Shizuka and Koutarou's feelings.

“But I feel so bad for Ruth-san! Even if you're not lovers, there are times when you want close friends to stop you, Satomi-kun!”

Ruth had asked Koutarou because she was hesitant and anxious. But in response she had gotten something amounting to not showing any interest from a close friend. Ruth had formed bonds with the people in this room, and if Koutarou had stopped her, she wouldn't have jumped out of the room, nor would she have a reason to be sad. Knowing that, Shizuka just couldn't forgive Koutarou for letting that happen.

“…”

Despite that, Koutarou couldn't answer. Since he believed Shizuka's criticism was justifiable.

“Shizuka, Koutarou is well aware of that. He couldn't say anything because he was.”

Kiriha reached out once more to Koutarou, who wouldn't say anything himself.

You really are an awkward man, Satomi Koutarou… Why would you choose the walk down the thorny path on your own?

Considering what Koutarou had done when he had learned of Kiriha's circumstances, it was obvious how he felt about Ruth. That's why she couldn't stand by and watch him get criticized. And she felt like it was her responsibility to clear his path of thorns.

“Why!?”

“That's—”

“That's enough, Kiriha-san. I'll say the rest myself.”

However, before Kiriha could represent his feelings, Koutarou cut her off. He was planning on keeping the reason for why he couldn't fulfill her wish a secret, but he would rather say it himself than have Kiriha do so for him.

“Koutarou… I understand. I was too presumptuous.”

The Problem of a Noble

Kiriha apologized to Koutarou. She realized that she had gotten a bit heated up herself and reflected on that. Kiriha understood everyone's feelings more than anyone else, that's why she couldn't keep silent and watch this misunderstanding.

“No, I don't mind. Thank you, Kiriha-san.”

That was Kiriha's kindness. That's why Koutarou had no intention of blaming her.

“So, what do you mean?”

“I think it would be best to at least give your opinion.”

Yurika and Sanae questioned Koutarou before Shizuka could. They couldn't understand Koutarou's remark either.

“Lately, I've been forgetting myself, but…”

Koutarou began speaking. His expression was stiff and serious. It was an expression he hadn't shown in room 106 before.

“Neither Ruth-san nor Theia are from this planet. And they were originally in a high position, with no point of contact with us. I can't just speak for them just like that.”

What worried Koutarou was that the two girls were aliens, and of an extremely high position.

“But that doesn't matter to us at all anymore!”

However, that wasn't enough to satisfy Shizuka. She knew what Ruth hoped for. And both she and Ruth valued the relations in this place.

“That might be true.”

“Then!”

“Landlord-san. Ruth-san is our friend and we would be sad to see her go, so we would be against her marriage. That might be good enough for us.”

Koutarou knew that, even he wanted to object. His bond with Ruth wasn't something that would be cut that easily.

“But… have you even thought of the problems those girls will face in the future?”

However, the reason he couldn't was because he was thinking of Ruth and Theia's future. He was unable to object, not because of their current life in this room, but for the sake of their future. That's what Koutarou believed, and he held back his own feelings because of it.

“That's…”

Koutarou's word erased a large chunk of Shizuka's anger. All she was thinking of was the present. She hadn't even considered the future.

“We don't know about Forthorthe, or what it would mean to refuse the proposal. It's possible that the fiancé would be able to protect Theia even more.”

Koutarou had no idea about what the current situation in Forthorthe was. He knew that Theia was in a dangerous position, but he didn't understand just what kind of danger that was. Whether Ruth got married or not should greatly affect the country's situation. However, he couldn't correctly understand the difference between marriage and refusal. He hadn't run through Forthorthe with Ruth like he had with Alaia.

“However, our objections might force them on an even harsher path. If that happens, is there anything we could do? … Could we take responsibility after forcing Ruth's decision?”

The Problem of a Noble

What Koutarou feared was that his emotions would lead Ruth and Theia onto an even more difficult path.

And if they made her reject the proposal, could they present a merit of equal or even higher value?

If they mistook their decision, Ruth and Theia would get a severe handicap against the power structure of Forthorthe. Koutarou was worried that if he let his feelings out, it might warp that decision.

This is for the best. Isn't that right, princess Alaia?

Koutarou's own decision came from his experiences of the past Forthorthe.

In the past Forthorthe, he had been able to directly witness great powers clashing. And he had seen what had happened to Alaia who was caught up in the middle of it.

Alaia prioritized the happiness of her citizens over her own. And Koutarou carried her wish on his shoulders. The weight of Signaltin, and the wooden insignia, was far from light. He wanted Ruth and Theia to be happy, but he didn't want any adverse effects to be inflicted upon Forthorthe. If anything, Koutarou made the decision Alaia surely would have made.

“Satomi-kun…”

Shizuka's anger had now completely vanished as she realized that Koutarou thought of Ruth and Theia even more than she did. Her enraged expression was replaced by a sorrowful one. She felt bad for only thinking of the present.

“I think of Ruth as more than a friend, I think of her as someone important to me. That's why I'll support her no matter what she decides. However, she has to make that decision by herself. That's because this is her own life, and I don't want her to have any regrets…”

In the end, Ruth had to be the one decide over her own life. Koutarou had no intentions of making that decision for her.

However, regardless of what Ruth chose, Koutarou was planning on protecting her and her master, Theia, as he wanted to protect their future.

Koutarou returned to room 106 from Forthorthe in order to do just that. And Signaltin and the insignia he carried most likely wished for him to do the same.

Part 6

The time was now past 10 PM, and traffic on the highway was next to nothing. The temperature was getting colder and colder as the chill permeated through the body.

The sound of metal rubbing up against metal could be heard from a small children's park not far from Corona House.

“…Why…”

That sound came from the swing that Ruth was sitting on. It was a horribly lonely sound that would be mistaken for a child's sobbing. And combined with Ruth's own crying, the sound echoed throughout the empty park.

“…Am, I…”

Ruth was thrown around by the overflowing sadness she was feeling. It was a feeling so intense that she would be unable to support her body if she wasn't holding onto the chains of the swing.

Satomi-sama…

Ruth wanted Koutarou to object to the arranged marriage. She didn't mind if she was treated as a woman. It would have been okay if he had objected as a friend, a companion or a roommate. She wanted him to say that he didn't want her to leave.

But, why…

However, now all that was on her mind was a strong yearning for Koutarou and an equally strong sadness. Ruth had only realized that she wanted Koutarou to treat her like a woman after hearing his answer. And that she felt so strongly for Koutarou that she wished for just that.

“Why… did I have such… foolish dream…”

She didn't mind if Koutarou became Theia's partner. However, she wanted some of his feelings to be directed towards her. She wanted him to compliment her cooking or her outfit.

“…I have nothing to say.”

However, Koutarou's answer was quite different from what Ruth had hoped for.

It was a much too sad answer for Ruth. She didn't need him to go as far as to have him confess his love for her, but she at least wanted him to worry. That had been her small wish. However, that wish had been unable to reach Koutarou. That's what Ruth had felt upon hearing Koutarou's words.

The sound coming from the swings increased. The new sound overlapped with the sound from Ruth's swing. Since she was so shaken with sadness, she didn't notice that sound at first. However, when she moved her face to wipe away some of her tears, she caught a glance of something golden at the corner of her eye. It wasn't until then that Ruth realized that someone was sitting on the swing next to hers.

“Your highness…”

The one sitting next to her was none other than Theia. Upon noticing that Ruth was looking at her, Theia showed a small smile.

“…So both master and servant make the same mistake, huh…”

Theia had once lost sight of Ruth, but she had managed to come here by tracking the positioning signal emitted from Ruth's bracelet. And upon spotting Ruth, she decided to join her on the swings.

The Problem of a Noble

With twice the amount of swings in motion, the sound from the chains doubled. Though since the swings were barely moving, the change was hardly noticeable. However, in return the lonely impression of the park weakened and Ruth's feelings turned slightly brighter. She was happy that Theia had come after her.

“Please listen, Ruth.”

Theia smiled at Ruth while shaking the swing. It wasn't a happy smile, but rather an embarrassed smile shown when reporting on a failure.

“Lately… I have had my head in the clouds. I had completely forgotten that I was an alien, and I fantasized… about a future with Koutarou.”

Theia would make room 106 her own and make Koutarou swear loyalty to her. She would then take Koutarou back with her to Forthorthe, and continue the life they lived here, there. And one day she would become empress, and Koutarou and Ruth would be by her side. She and Koutarou might even be married.

Theia had fantasized about such a dream.

“…The same… goes for me too…”

The same was true for Ruth.

Ruth would follow behind Theia and Koutarou. Every now and then, the two would turn around and give her a smile. And once Theia and Koutarou got married, Ruth would give them her blessing.

Theia and Ruth had fantasized about the same dream.

“However… me marrying Koutarou means that I would have to be prepared to discontinue the Mastir family lineage.”

Theia was a human from Forthorthe, while Koutarou was a human from Earth.

Since they were species from two completely different planets, the chances that the two could have a child was close to none. It was rare to see even closely related species be able to have a child on Earth. And if one considered that they come from two different planets, regardless of how similar they might look, the chance of having a child was nigh impossible.

So if the two were to get married, it would spell the end of the Mastir family bloodline.

“That's… yes…”

It wasn't until Theia mentioned it that Ruth first realized that problem. Like Theia, Ruth had begun thinking of Koutarou as a man from Forthorthe.

“And what's more, he would have to resolve himself to give up his own homeland. He would have to resolve himself that he wouldn't be able to make a new family.”

If Koutarou was to serve as a knight, it would mean that he would have to give up his homeland. And without the ability to make a child, Koutarou's family would never increase. It would mean that Koutarou would be isolated on Forthorthe.

“No matter how much I feel for him, in the end, I am an alien…”

“So is… that's why you have been feeling so down these past few days?”

If Theia were to have Koutarou become her knight and bring him home to Forthorthe, she would have to resign herself to isolating Koutarou. In other words, she would have to bring Koutarou with her, knowing he would be unhappy. Theia believed that was a big mistake. That was the worry that had pained Theia these past few days.

“…That's right. But Ruth, isn't the same true for you?”

“Yes… I forgot that I was an alien and wanted Satomi-sama to stop me…”

Ruth nodded.

Ruth was the same as Theia had been. She hadn't really considered just what the consequences of her wish was.

I see… so that's why Satomi-sama…

With that, Ruth was able to understand why Koutarou chose not to say anything. It wasn't because he was indifferent. But it was because he had considered something not even she had.

“However, Koutarou won't stop you.”

Theia smiled while thinking of Koutarou. It was a gentle, wry smile one would show their clumsy sibling. Right now, Theia perfectly understood Koutarou's feelings.

“He might say a lot of things, and he's surely an alien to us, but… he's, without a doubt, a knight of Forthorthe. He will never do anything irresponsible… so that we might make the best choice…”

“Yes…”

Ruth was an alien. In regards to the arranged marriage, since Koutarou didn't understand the circumstances of Forthorthe, anything he might say would be dominated by emotions. And Ruth desired those words of emotion. However, that didn't sit well with Koutarou, and so he spoke those words that might be mistaken for indifference.

Koutarou hadn't been indifferent, if anything he was very concerned. But after thinking it through, he had decided not to speak his own opinion. He hadn't forgotten what Ruth had.

Upon realizing that, a large weight was lifted off Ruth's shoulders. However, it was only about half of what was weighing her down. The reality that she wouldn't be able to reach Koutarou shook her even now.

“If he was… a more selfish man who didn't think of the consequences… we might not have had to worry this much…”

“…But in that case, myself and your highness wouldn't need Satomi-sama this much.”

Theia and Ruth wanted Koutarou to become a vassal because the two of them believed he was the strongest of knights, even stronger than the Blue Knight. And because he was the strongest knight, he wouldn't say anything that would risk Theia and Ruth's positions. In other words, the part of Koutarou that they valued the most was the reason for why he had gotten in the way of their wish.

“I guess that's to be expected from the man we love…”

“Yes…”

It was a serious dilemma for the two, and an easy solution was nowhere in sight.

They continued swinging. The clock passed midnight, and their surroundings were still dead quiet, aside from the sound of the chains of their swings.

The Day Without Ruth

Part 1

February 10, Wednesday

On that day, by the time Koutarou woke up, the smell of breakfast was already filling room 106. It was the familiar smell of miso soup and broiled fish. Just another morning.

“Koutarou, woke up Ho-!”

“He's been getting better at waking up lately Ho-!”

“…Good morning, Karama, Korama.”

However, something was slightly different from normal on that day. These past few months, it had been Theia and Ruth's job to wake Koutarou up. Normally, Ruth would wake him up, but every now and then Theia would step on him.

However, today Koutarou was woken up by Karama and Korama.

I wonder if something happened?

Having just woken up, Koutarou's brain was still half asleep and he looked around the room with a blank stare. To Koutarou, it was so natural for him to be woken up by Theia and Ruth that he instinctively scanned the room for them.

Only Kiriha-san is here…?

All Koutarou found were the two haniwas in front of him and Kiriha who was making breakfast in the kitchen. And Sanae, who was sleeping inside of him. He saw no signs of Theia who would normally be elegantly drinking tea, or of Ruth who would be helping Kiriha in the kitchen. Not only had they not woken him up, but they were nowhere to be seen.

“…Where's Theia and Ruth-san?”

Koutarou rubbed his tired eyes and asked the haniwas. The two haniwas jumped up and down on the bed and raised the hands above their heads.

“Theia-chan and Ruth-chan are on the Blue Knight Ho-!”

“Apparently, Ruth-chan's fiancé is coming Ho-!”

“Oh yeah, now that I think about it, they mentioned something like that…”

Two days had passed since Ruth had received a message from her home.

Normally it took several days to travel between Forthorthe and Earth in a spaceship. It wasn't a distance that could be covered in just two days. However, the eager fiancé had left Forthorthe before the parents even sent their video letter.

It sure is lonely to not be able to see the faces you expect in the morning…

Kiriha was preparing breakfast on her own. The sound of the kitchen knife being swung filled the room. There were no other sounds that stood out. Neither the sound of Ruth's slippers nor Theia's tea set could be heard today. It was a morning slightly different from the norm. Koutarou felt somewhat melancholic just with the lack of two people.

“So you're awake, Koutarou.”

Kiriha noticed Koutarou and stuck her face into the room.

“Ruth's not here this morning, so please wait a little longer for breakfast.”

Kiriha smiled wryly as she said that and returned to the kitchen. Koutarou wasn't just seeing things when he thought that Kiriha looked lonely. Kiriha also had a lot of concerns regarding Ruth's circumstances.

If Ruth-san gets married, this will probably be what every day will be like…

Koutarou recalled that he had felt something similar when the troubles regarding Kiriha had surfaced. Today was the opposite of that time.

If Ruth were to vanish from this room, Theia would also vanish as there would be no one to prepare tea. Theia would appear much less frequently in this room. That would be a sad thing for everyone related to room 106.

That's right… it's thanks to everyone that I can enjoy each day to its fullest…

Koutarou imagined being left all alone in room 106.

The ghost haunting this room would be gone, there would be no freeloader living in the wardrobe, no underground passage underneath one of the tatami mats, and no glowing wall leading to a spaceship.

It would be a completely normal apartment, just like when he had first moved in. He couldn't help but think of that as horribly lonely. The day after he had moved in, the invading girls had appeared one after another and while he had spent every day desperately trying to chase them out, he had started to enjoy their presence before he even knew it.

In that case… there at least one thing I was able to convey to Ruth…

When Ruth had asked for Koutarou's opinion he had remained quiet. He did so because he believed that would be best for her. However, upon seeing this room without some of its key members, he began feeling like he had kept too quiet.

The Day Without Ruth

The Day Without Ruth

“Mmm~… Koutarou, is it morning already?”

That was when Sanae stuck her face out of Koutarou's chest and rubbed her eyes. It seemed that she had woken up.

“Yeah. But breakfast won't be for a while longer, so you can sleep a little longer.”

“'Kay.”

Sanae pulled her hand back and closed her eyes again.

“Koutarou, it's a bit colder than normal, so pump yourself up and make it warm.”

“…Yeah, I'll give it a shot.”

“Mmm~, please do…”

After closing her eyes, Sanae quickly fell asleep. Koutarou smiled as he watched over Sanae who was using his body as a sleeping bag.

“I see… so my insides are colder than normal, huh…”

It looked like Koutarou was sadder than he thought now that Ruth and Theia were gone.

Meanwhile, Ruth and Theia were on the landing deck of the Blue Knight. They were preparing to welcome Ruth's fiancé. Since the Blue Knight was far larger, Ruth's fiancé's spaceship would land inside of it.

“So that's the young son of DKI.”

Theia narrowed her eyes as if she appraised Ruth's fiancé.

A young man who looked to be in his twenties appeared from the small spaceship. He was the famous young leader of the mega corporation, Dragon Knight Industries.

Dragon Knight Industries, or DKI for short, is a company that was founded by a person of Melcemheim lineage. Since the founder had the scale of an elder dragon as an heirloom, it was said the he was given the title of Dragon Knight.

At first it had started as a trading company, but as generations passed it began expanding into other directions. And now it didn't just sell products, but also produced their own. By doing that, the company earned massive profits and its growth exploded. As a result, it was now a famous and important company in Forthorthe that sold all kinds of things.

“Yes, your highness. This is Elexis Borannam-sama.”

“He looks frail… but that doesn't seem to be all there is to him.”

The man in charge of DKI was Elexis Borannam, and this person was Ruth's fiancé.

The year after finishing his studies, Elexis took over management of DKI after his father. At the time, DKI's growth had begun to die down, but after Elexis was appointed its growth shot up once more. In just a few years, DKI grew throughout all the solar systems under Forthorthe's control. Because of this, Elexis got famous, as a young and excellent CEO.

And Elexis wasn't just known as a businessman, but also as a philanthropist. Every year he personally donated a massive amount of money.

On top of that, Elexis lived by the philosophy that large profits are born from a healthy society. And he had DKI itself contribute massively to society. By doing that, he had a lot of quarrels with the shareholders, but thanks to Elexis's achievements and popularity, they had no choice but to reluctantly back down.

It was because of those reasons that Elexis was more than suited as the fiancé for the Pardomshiha family's beloved daughter. Another reason was that while he wasn't a noble, he had Melcemheim blood flowing in his veins. Elexis was a promising fiancé that many powerful nobles wished for.

“I am glad to make your acquaintance. My name is Elexis Borannam. It is a pleasure meeting you, your highness.”

Upon arriving, Elexis first greeted Theia. While he might be Ruth's fiancé, he started off by greeting the princess.

Up close, Elexis was a graceful man. He was of tall stature, and the clothes, shoes and accessories he was wearing, even his golden hair, were all very refined and beautiful, and gave him the image of a gentleman. His figure which gave off the impression of power and sharpness backed that image up. His slim face and long narrow eyes gave off the signs of a high intellect. One could definitely feel the atmosphere of a man standing above others.

“You have done well to come so far. I won't mind, so come closer. We won't even be able to talk from this distance.”

Theia glanced at Elexis's appearance and invited him closer. The arranged marriage wouldn't be able to proceed if he stayed several meters away.

This man's the opposite of Koutarou…

That was Theia's first impression. The only thing Elexis and Koutarou really had in common was their height.

“Your words are wasted on me.”

After bowing to Theia, Elexis looked behind him. There he saw five bodyguards in black.

“…You can stay there. Guarding me won't be necessary here.”

“Yes sir.”

“If you'd like, you can return to the ship.”

“That's a little too much, this is our duty after all.”

“Hahaha, you'll lose out if you're too serious you know.”

Elexis laughed at the bodyguards and approached Ruth and Theia with slow, confident steps. As he reached them, Ruth opened her mouth.

“Elexis-sama. I am Ruthkania Nye Pardomshiha.”

“It is a pleasure meeting you, Ruthkania-sama.”

“Please, call me Ruth.”

“In that case, please call me El, Ruth-sama.”

Elexis smiled and he kneeled in front of Ruth. Since his family had given up their nobility, there was a large difference in their positions.

“Please, stand up, El-sama. You must be tired from your long journey.”

“Thank you very much, Ruth-sama.”

Elexis looked up at Ruth and smiled before slowly standing up. Because of his height, when he was this close he felt quite overpowering. After taking a step back, Ruth looked up at his face.

So this person, is my fiancé…

It was at this moment that Ruth noticed that she held no feelings for Elexis whatsoever. Though that was a given since this was the first time they met, but another reason was because she had been occupied thinking of another person these past few days.

“I have seen pictures of you before, but in person you look even more dignified and lovely. This was most definitely worth hurrying things along.”

Elexis, on the other hand, seemed quite satisfied with Ruth. He had taken an interest in Ruth since he first saw her picture, and rushed all this way to meet her. As such, there was a large difference in feelings between the two.

Oh no, he's gone through the trouble to come this far to meet me, I better not do anything rude…

This had been a sudden development for Ruth, and his visit had been so sudden, but he was a fiancé that satisfied Ruth's parents, and as such she couldn't be impolite. Regardless of if she would proceed with the marriage or turn him down, she had to face him upfront. So Ruth braced herself and faced Elexis again.

“Thank you very much, El-sama. You are welcome on board.”

“I felt that it might be a little too fast, but my experience at work has told me that if I leave a good deal be, it will often run away. Because of that, I have pushed away my work to come here.”

Ruth could tell from Elexis's appearance that he was very positive in regards to this marriage. Acting quickly on a good deal was very fitting of a manager.

He seems to have taken a liking to me, and he seems like a nice person, but…

He seemed to have a pushy side to him, but it wasn't for the worse. And his relationship with his bodyguards seemed to be quite friendly as well. Ruth could feel that he was a good person, just like his reputation said he was. However, there was something that bothered Ruth.

“Ruth, let’s not stand here and talk. Why don't you lead Elexis-dono to his room?”

Guest rooms existed onboard the Blue Knight. They would serve as a much better place to talk in peace and quiet than the landing deck.

“Your highness… that's true.”

Upon realizing Theia's intentions, Ruth quickly agreed and indicated the exit of the landing deck to Elexis.

“El-sama, come this way please. I will guide you to your room.”

“No, allow me to guide you.”

“Your highness!?”

“It's okay, don't worry.”

The moment Ruth tried to lead the way, Theia overtook her and took the lead. Ruth felt uncomfortable making her master lead the way.

“…I'm sure you have plenty to think about.”

“Your highness…”

However, the remark Theia whispered to Ruth made her consent. Theia hadn't volunteered to guide because of their relationship as master and servant, but because they were childhood friends.

“Princess Theiamillis, I am utmost grateful for your consideration.”

“Do not fear, Ruth's guest is my guest. And besides, I am the supporting player today.”

The Day Without Ruth

Theia proceeded to lead the way, behind her were Ruth and Elexis, walking side by side. As she looked at Theia in front of her with Elexis by her side, Ruth was absorbed in thought.

I do believe that El-sama is a good person, but… something is… wrong with this sight…

Theia walked ahead with Ruth and Elexis following behind her. If Ruth and Elexis got married, this would probably become normal. However, something didn't click for Ruth. This is what had been bothering Ruth.

Satomi-sama would… be more like…

Ruth was imagining what it would look like if she, Theia and Koutarou were walking on the landing deck instead.

Theia and Koutarou would lead the way with Ruth following behind them. The two would argue, and sometimes even brawl. However, they always looked like they were having fun and show energetic smiles. That alone was enough to make Ruth happy. And no matter how much the two would fuss they wouldn't forget about Ruth, as they would sometimes turn around and talk to her about something.

That was Ruth's everyday, but it was also what she hoped would continue in the future. Right now, there was nothing Ruth could imagine with any more ease than a future with Koutarou. And that future perfectly overlapped with Ruth's sensibilities.

Is it because of the time we've spent together, or perhaps it's Satomi-sama's very nature…

Ruth couldn't imagine a future with Elexis as clear as that. And when she finally did manage to imagine that future, it didn't fit her sensibilities.

That was when Ruth's heel got caught in a seam on the floor.

“Kyaa!?”

Since she was deep in thought, Ruth completely lost her balance and fell down towards the floor.

“I got you.”

However, Ruth didn't crash into the floor. Elexis had stopped her before she did.

Though Ruth had been gaining some physique from her daily training, since she originally didn't like exercising, Ruth would sometimes fall down like this. And as she did, a certain someone nearby would always save her. So Ruth instinctively smiled and thanked that person.

“Thank you very much, Sa—”

However, she stopped midsentence. That's because the person that had saved her this time was someone different from normal.

“Are you okay, Ruth-sama?”

“Ah…”

The feeling of the arms wrapped around her body and the face in front of her was different from normal. And the moment Ruth noticed that, she was overcome by an uncomfortable feeling, guilt and rejection.

“N-No!”

Ruth almost pushed Elexis away as she separated her body from his. She knew that he had saved her out of good intentions, but a part of her deep inside rejected him.

The feeling of the arms around her was different. They were normally more coarse and powerful. The face in front of her was different. It was normally more innocent. And the presence she felt was different. It normally made her feel safe. And most of all, she felt guilty.

All of that combined became the reason for why Ruth pushed Elexis away.

“Oh my, this was most impolite of me. It was ill-mannered of me to do this to a woman.”

However, Elexis showed no signs of being bothered by that and smiled as he distanced himself from Ruth.

“N-No, thank you very much for saving me.”

Ruth began feeling bad for Elexis.

El-sama only saved me out of good intentions…

Having reflexively pushed Elexis away from her after he had saved her, made Ruth realize that she wasn't actually looking at the person in front of her. That was very rude to towards someone that had come so far to meet her.

This is no good… I might get married to this person…

Ruth decided to change gears.

Now wasn't the time to think of other things, instead she should focus on Elexis. She needed to talk to him and determine whether or not she should get married.

Part 2

What was important to Ruth was what results her marriage with Elexis would bring.

If Ruth and Elexis were to get married, Ruth would gain Elexis's financial powers and his political influence, and Elexis would gain the Pardomshiha name and social standing. That could be considered give and take.

However, that wasn't all. There were three other problems that bothered Ruth.

The first was whether or not Elexis could be trusted. Upon speaking directly with him, Ruth felt like he was trustworthy. On top of that, the Pardomshiha family's intelligence division had researched Elexis's personal life. In short term, there were no problems whatsoever. But what about the future? He wasn't a knight but a merchant. Wasn't the reason for DKI's growth that he always sided with someone who could bring him profit? Right now he was on Theia's side, but would he stay on her side in the future? Could he still be trusted if Theia's political influence was to wane for some reason? In other words, Ruth was a little anxious because Elexis wasn't a knight.

The next problem was regarding Elexis's human nature. This was similar to the first problem, but here his personal side came into question. If Ruth were to marry him, he would naturally end up being by Theia's side often. If Theia were to suffer because of that, it would be problematic. Was Elexis really a man that Theia would want close to her? It was necessary to take his character, opinions and even hobbies into account. Like the first problem, this was a small cause for concern.

And the final problem. This was the most important one, but it was regarding what Ruth wanted to do about the arranged marriage.

Ruth was aware of how valuable this marriage was. By increasing Ruth's political influence, she could indirectly be of Theia's aid. What's more is that Elexis gave off a good vibe. Although he had a pushy side to him, he seemed positive and kind. If they were to get married, he would surely make her happy. She had two minor doubts, but she felt like she didn't need to worry about his character. Ruth would probably never have a fiancé more blessed than this.

However, something deep inside her wondered if this was okay. She felt like she was betraying something. That's why Ruth couldn't decide on marriage despite such favorable conditions.

It would be best if I get married with El-sama… that much is obvious to anyone… I am probably only anxious because it's all so sudden… as time passes that should solve itself…

There is no reason to refuse and everything will surely go well.

Ruth repeatedly told herself that while praying that she would come to believe that to be the truth.

Part 3

Ruth and Theia arrived at Kitsushouharukaze high school just as the lunch period was about to end. They sat down at their desks and stayed quiet. It looked like the two of them were deep in thought.

Koutarou was worriedly looking over the two.

Of course they'll worry… Marriage is a big deal after all…

This was a major event that would determine Ruth's future. And to Theia, her childhood friend's life was about to be decided. It was not such a simple problem. Even Koutarou understood that they would have a hard time smiling. When the Satomi family had suddenly lost the mother, there was a time where the father had thought of remarrying. When Koutarou thought of that, he believed he could imagine how they might feel.

Alright, I'll leave it to after school.

There was something Koutarou wanted to talk to Ruth about. However, as the lunch period was about to end, he didn't have enough time for it now. He decided to hold onto it until after school.

As the school bell rang out, Ruth was looking at the clock installed above the blackboard. It was now three o'clock and school had already ended. However, Ruth didn't register the time or the school bell. Not even the contents of the afternoon classes had stayed with her. She was currently fully occupied with her worries.

Oh right, I better hurry home…

It took about ten seconds after the school bell rang out until Ruth realized that school had ended for the day. Recalling that she had a guest, she hurriedly got up from her seat. And at the same time, Theia arrived next to her.

"Ruth, I'll go on ahead. Elexis-dono might be getting up. You go and prepare dinner."

Ruth and Theia had come to school because Elexis had needed to rest because of the time lag. And preparations for dinner had to be made before he woke up. So the two divided the work on the preparations.

"Thank you very much, your highness. I am relying on you."

"Yes. You keep it together too. It's your guest after all."

Theia waved her hand and left the classroom. She hadn't been as distracted as Ruth and had already finished preparations to go home.

"This won't do, I need to keep it together…"

Ruth warned herself for being too disconcerted.

She should have left the classroom with Theia, but she had been unable to do so because she was too shaken. It wasn't a very good sign.

Having woken up, Ruth put her bag on her desk and began gathering her notes and textbooks.

"Ruth-san."

That was when Koutarou called out to her.

Part 4

As they stepped through the gates to the school, there was no conversation between Koutarou and Ruth.

Koutarou wanted to talk to Ruth, but it was private information so he couldn't do so with people around. Because of that, Koutarou remained silent.

And Ruth had her complex feelings regarding Koutarou.

When Ruth had consulted with Koutarou regarding this event two days ago, he had said something that could be taken as inconsiderate. But after talking to Theia, Ruth now understood Koutarou's intentions. However, those words still made her sad. The feminine part of her wanted Koutarou to say something more.

And one more thing. Ruth was scared of acting normally around Koutarou, because she believed she would be unable to make her decision regarding the marriage. She wanted to avoid Koutarou because she felt like she would make a rash decision.

That's why both Koutarou and Ruth remained silent. The two of them headed towards Corona House without exchanging any words. This was the first time there had ever been this much tension between these two.

That silence continued for a while, but about five minutes after passing through the gate, Ruth broke the silence. The people around them had diminished and Ruth couldn't take this silence and tension.

“…Satomi-sama, just what did you want to talk about?”

Ruth asked in a harsh tone. Her voice didn't contain any emotion at all and it was almost as if she was talking to an enemy. That was the best bluff she could muster.

“There's something I wanted to apologize to you for.”

Koutarou however, was the same as always. He carried his bag with a carefree expression, like always and walked in the same pace as normal. That alone seemed to make Ruth mortified.

“An apology?”

Upon hearing that word, Ruth showed a stern expression.

Could it be that he doesn't want to become her highness's vassal…?

There weren't many things that Ruth could think of that Koutarou might want to apologize for. The first thing that popped into her head was regarding the case where she had asked Koutarou to serve Theia. Since it was a problem of utmost importance, her expression naturally turned serious.

“Yes.”

Koutarou nodded began talking about what had been bothering him since this morning.

“It's about the arranged marriage you asked me about two days ago.”

“Eh…”

Koutarou began speaking about something Ruth hadn't expected.

It's about that time…?

She had been certain it was about something else, so she was shocked and her serious expression melted away.

“At that time… I didn't think there was anything I had to say to you, but I later realized that there was something I needed to tell you.”

“Satomi-sama… ah…”

Ruth noticed that her expression had changed and hurriedly tried to recreate it.

“So first I'd like apologize. I'm sorry, Ruth-san. I hadn't thought things through back then.”

Koutarou glanced into Ruth's eyes while apologizing.

“Y-Yes…”

Confused, Ruth nodded her head. Seeing that, Koutarou instinctively smiled wryly.

I really should have thought about us a little more. I'm sorry, Ruth-san.

Koutarou realized how immature he was as the sight of the anxious Ruth two days ago and the sight of the confused Ruth in front of him overlapped.

“This is… something I'd like you to keep to yourself.”

Koutarou started by saying that and shifted his glance away from Ruth. Instead he looked into the winter sky.

“My family lost my mother early on, and me and my dad lived on our own. About a year ago, my dad's transfer was decided… just as I had gotten accepted to this school, and I ended up living on my own.”

In the big blue winter sky was a single small cloud. And like that small cloud, Koutarou was supposed to live in this large city on his own.

“But that didn't happen. The day after I moved in, everyone attacked.”

Four girls had shown up to claim the tiny room 106 of Corona House. And in order to protect his room, Koutarou ended up having to fight. The girls had all kind of goals and personalities, and their restless days began.

“Satomi-sama…”

Ruth didn't understand why Koutarou was bringing this topic up. But based on how Koutarou was behaving, she could tell that this was very important to him, so she held back her questions and listened to what he had to say.

“Ten months have passed since then.”

Koutarou counted the months on his fingers and smiled at Ruth.

“During that time, a lot of things happened, right?”

“Yes…”

A lot of things. All kinds of memories popped in to Ruth's head upon hearing that.

Sanae was kidnapped. Theia was attacked by Clan. Underground people that wouldn't obey Kiriha came to attack. They had also acted out plays. And the Christmas party and ski trip had been a blast.

She could remember all these things just by thinking a little. Including all the minor stuff, there were countless memories.

“And… I only now realized. It's thanks to Ruth-san and everyone that I have been so happy these past ten months.”

The Day Without Ruth

During these past ten months Koutarou had experienced all kinds of trouble. But it wasn't until now that he realized that only the beginning had troubled him. By the time he learned of the girls' circumstances, there were no more painful things. Now, Koutarou could confidently say that it was thanks to the invading girls that he had been so happy these past ten months.

He couldn't say it to Yurika or Sanae since it'd just go to their head, but that was the truth. And because that was the truth, Koutarou had returned from the past Forthorthe. To fulfill the girls' wishes and protect this every day.

"S-Sato…"

Koutarou's words sunk into Ruth's chest and her heart began pounding wildly. Her mind turned white and she couldn't think of anything. A large crack was torn into the wall around her heart.

Oh no, if I listen to this any more, I'll…

Ruth's reasoning warned her. However, she was soon unable to hear that warning as her heart beat even faster.

"Ruth-san, I don't know how you felt about these past ten months. But if you're worrying about your marriage, I want you to choose whatever you believe would bring you the most happiness."

Koutarou was grateful to the invading girls. And of course, Ruth as well. So Koutarou wanted each and every day in Ruth's life to be as happy as his was. Whether she got married or not, he wanted her to choose what she believed would bring her the most happiness.

"I won't mind what you chose for that. But in exchange, I'll support you regardless of what that choice is."

That was Koutarou's decision.

For the simple reason of repaying what had been given to him.

"Please choose a future that will give you happiness, one that you won't regret later. That's my answer to your question, no, it's probably my wish."

If Ruth was anxious about the marriage, then she should think of a method to ease that anxiety. If she wanted to stop the marriage, that was fine. If that happened, Koutarou would do what he could to protect Theia and Ruth. He might even become Theia's vassal as Ruth had suggested. Or he could discuss with the other girls of the room and come up with an even better solution.

Since Koutarou wasn't knowledgeable of Forthorthe's current situation, he didn't want to say anything that could sway Ruth's decision. But he wanted her to choose whatever made her happy. And he would respect her choice and support her. That was Koutarou's answer.

He also felt that it was his duty because as the one keeping Signaltin and Charl's insignia. What Alaia wanted to protect wasn't Signaltin, but the happiness of the people in her world. And the leading figure of people's happiness, Charl, had given him a homemade insignia of rank. In that case, he had to protect Ruth and Theia's happiness as well. Even now, Koutarou was carrying on Alaia and Charl's wish.

"I…"

If Ruth's only worry had been about the arranged marriage, she probably would have annulled it now. Koutarou's answer far exceeded what Ruth had hoped for the other day.

"And what's more is that he would have to resolve himself to give up his own homeland. And he would have to resolve himself that he wouldn't be able to make a new family."

However, Ruth remembered Theia's words.

The Day Without Ruth

If I wish to live my life with Satomi-sama, he would surely do so… but that would make Satomi-sama unhappy… and I can't let that happen!

Ruth too wanted Koutarou to live with a smile on his lips. About as much as she wished the same for Theia. And that was barely enough to keep her from annulling the arranged marriage.

"…Is that all?"

Ruth desperately tried to keep her feelings from showing and answered in a calm voice. And in order to keep herself from smiling she gritted her teeth.

"Yes."

Koutarou didn't think it was strange for Ruth to have such a serious expression. That's because he believed that what he had said two days had really hurt her.

"Then I'll excuse myself here. I have to prepare dinner for my guest after this."

Ruth bowed her head while maintaining her stiff expression and hurriedly parted with Koutarou. She felt like if she stayed by Koutarou any longer, she would be unable to contain her feelings.

Your highness… Your highness, this must be what you felt…

And Ruth was finally able to understand the feelings her small master held.

"Well then."

Ruth sped up after saying a short farewell.

Everything is alright… I was able to pull it off…

Ruth felt a deep relief that she had been able to keep her feelings together and that she had been able to keep Koutarou from being unhappy. Because of that deep relief, however, she failed to pay attention to her footing.

The Day Without Ruth

The tip of her foot caught on a slight difference in height on the pavement.

“Kyaa!?”

Since she had started to speed up, her body was falling towards the ground at quite some speed. If she had crashed into ground like that, she might have suffered serious injuries.

However, that didn't happen. Before she had crashed, someone caught her. That person's hand was large, and from the sensation of being held and the slight warmth, Ruth could tell who it was right away.

“Satomi-sama…”

“Are you okay, Ruth-san?”

The one that stopped Ruth was Koutarou. And at the same time, Ruth came to understand something.

It's this person… as I thought, this person is the only one for me…

Right in the center of Ruth's view was Koutarou, smiling with relief. However, that image of Koutarou was quickly distorted by tears.

The moment she realized she was being held by Koutarou, Ruth could no longer muster any strength. She felt like she wanted to stay this way forever.

The power she felt from the arms around her, the comfortable warmth from his body temperature and the feeling of security she felt from his presence made Ruth's intuition scream out.

Our place is here… if I stay here, I will be happy… her highness surely would too… Here we will definitely be happy…

That intuition destroyed whatever let Ruth keep her feelings in check.

No… I don't want anyone but this person… It's not that I hate El-sama, I just can't live without this person…!

But even then, Ruth tried to get away from Koutarou. She did her best to pour her strength into her arms to push Koutarou away.

“L-Let me go! Please, Satomi-sama! At this rate, I'll… I'll!”

“R-Ruth-san?”

Koutarou loosened his arms around Ruth who suddenly began to struggle. Since he didn't understand why she was crying, he stopped moving.

“Why do you make me dream!? Why!? Even though I know I can't go on like this! Even though I had decided to give up!”

After escaping from Koutarou's arms, Ruth ran away at full speed without looking back. If she didn't, she would make the wrong the decision. The wall around her heart had collapsed and the feelings they contained escaped as tears fell from her eyes. For each step she took, her tears scattered.

Satomi-sama, Satomi-sama! I…!

Ruth's body separated from Koutarou, but her feelings remained by his side.

Part 5

Ruth had escaped into Theia's private room onboard the Blue Knight. Apart from room 106, there weren't a lot of places she could live as an alien. In the end, Ruth relied on her childhood friend.

“Y-Your highness… U-Ugh, Uaaaaaaaa!”

“Ruth!? What, happened to you?”

Upon seeing Ruth barging into her room and dropping down on the floor while crying, Theia dropped what she was doing and ran up to Ruth's side.

“I'm sorry, your highness. I'm sorry!”

Sitting down on the floor, Ruth dropped her shoulders and looked down on the carpet while continuing to cry. It almost looked like she was prostrating.

“Just what are you apologizing for? I can't understand if you just cry, explain!”

Theia squatted down next to Ruth. Ruth pushed her hands down on the carpet and looked up at Theia. Her face was covered in tears and sadness. There was no trace of her normally kind, gentle face.

“I already know! Thinking of the future, it would be best for me to marry El-sama! And that Satomi-sama would be happiest if we left him on Earth!”

Ruth threw all of her emotions at Theia. There was no need to hold anything back as the two of them had always lived this way up until now.

“B-But, I understand now! Only he will do for me! Nobody else will work!”

“Ruth…”

Upon hearing Ruth's words, Theia showed a solemn smile. She was painfully aware of what Ruth was talking about. It was because she held the same feelings as Ruth.

“If I accept this marriage, it will surely be of great help to you! If we instead bring that person to Forthorthe, he will surely be unhappy! But I, I!”

Ruth's tears scattered upon the carpet and formed a spotted pattern. And Ruth pushed her hand on that pattern and she buried the tips of her fingers into the carpet.

“…I will start wishing to feel that person’s, Satomi-sama's, warmth and noble heart up close!”

Going by reason alone, the best would be to marry Elexis and leave Koutarou behind on Earth. That would be the correct choice. However, Ruth's heart rejected that logical choice. Reason and emotion clashed and tore her heart apart. And the pain from that made her scream and cry.

“No matter what I might say, I can't pretend like I don't love him…”

Theia unburied Ruth's fingers, one at a time, and took her hand. She then held it with both of her own hands and embraced it.

“Your highness, I-I'm truly… sorry…”

“I don't mind. I understand those feelings very well…”

Still embracing Ruth's hand, Theia gently smiled, like Ruth had always done when she had been sad. Theia continued like that until Ruth stopped crying.

“Still… I am a little envious of you.”

“Eh?”

Ruth instinctively looked up upon hearing those words, and Theia and Ruth's eyes met. Ruth was surprised, while Theia was smiling. Their positions were now reversed.

“You already have your answer don't you. All that's left is to make the leap. But… I can't take such a bold step myself. So… I am a little envious of you…”

Ruth was born from a distinguished family of knights with a long history of traditions. So continuing that bloodline had a lot of meaning. However, the same was true for Theia, but in her case it was even more important. Choosing Koutarou would mean destroying one of the royal families. The Mastir family had continued since even before the Silver Princess, Alaia, and was the oldest family in Forthorthe. So allowing the Mastir family's bloodline to die out was the same as throwing that history away. As such, Theia still couldn't make her decision.

“But it's all about perspective. If you chose to live with Koutarou, it wouldn't be such a bad future for me…”

“Your highness…”

Upon her birth, Theia had been put into the shackles called Forthorthe. And while they shone golden, they were gigantic and heavy shackles that wouldn't let her move freely.

Part 6

Even after her tears had dried up, Ruth didn't return to room 106. Facing Koutarou was still painful for her. Her dinner with Elexis had also been delayed until tomorrow as she had been unable to make any preparations.

In the end, with time to kill, Ruth headed to the Blue Knight's hangar. She was planning on performing maintenance of Koutarou's armor that had been left there.

Ruth had already made up her mind regarding the arranged marriage, she just couldn't take it to the next step. That said, it wasn't easy to just decline. She would have to meet with Elexis's parents and apologize directly. It wasn't something that could be settled by sending a single message to her own parents. So Ruth had to temporarily return to Forthorthe no matter what.

There, the problem of Theia's guard arose. Ruth's job wasn't just to attend to Theia, but to guard her as well. So though temporary, while Ruth was away, there would be no one to protect Theia. Since she couldn't allow that, Ruth was going to finish the maintenance on the armor and ask Koutarou. In the end, the only one Ruth could entrust Theia to was him.

A blue armor was kept standing in a rigid posture in the maintenance division of the hangar. That posture had been calculated by the computer built into to armor using current operation data and was very similar to what Koutarou looked like when wearing the armor.

The Blue Knight's armor, huh… If only Satomi-sama was the real Blue Knight…

Ruth looked at the armor and let out a small sigh.

To Ruth and Theia, Koutarou was someone who exceeded even the Blue Knight. The legendary hero, the Blue Knight, probably would protect Theia's life, but Koutarou wouldn't just protect her life, but also her heart. The Blue Knight couldn't be trusted with that much. It was because they believed Koutarou to be even greater that the engraving on the armor's chest read as 'Theiamillis's Blue Knight.'

However, that was just between Theia and Ruth. To the people of Forthorthe, Koutarou was just an alien. Since he is from a planet with a less developed civilization, he would be treated like a neanderthal, just like Theia had once done. That said, if he was just Theia's vassal, there wouldn't any problem for the Pardomshiha family to accept him as their adopted son. But things would be different if they were to get married. The entirety of Forthorthe would be shook if Theia were to marry with a neanderthal from a backwater planet. And massive protests would surely erupt.

He didn't have to be the Blue Knight, but if Koutarou was at least born from a family of knights, it would have been a simpler story.

“No… In that case, her highness probably wouldn't have fallen in love with Satomi-sama…”

Ruth shook her head upon reaching that conclusion.

Theia had fallen in love with Koutarou because they were rivals on equal standing. It is because they were able to reveal their everything to one another that Theia had come to love Koutarou. So if Koutarou had been from a family of knights, that wouldn't have happened.

“There's no use in grumbling… I have to continue my work…”

Ruth changed gears and operated a panel near the armor to start the armor's maintenance.

Maintenance on the hardware had already been completed beforehand. After picking up the damaged locations of the armor, she had ordered the repairing device to repair those parts.

The Day Without Ruth

So today's work was mostly regarding software maintenance. She would perform adjustments to the operating data and on the new parts to prevent any trouble when Koutarou wore the armor the next time.

“Now looking at it again… there are a lot of unreasonable parameters…”

When confirming the state of the armor, Ruth felt like something was amiss. The exchanged parts all showed initial values, but many of the parts that hadn't been changed were showing strange values.

A simple example would be the motor of the arm. It had been set to allow to momentarily allow the use of its full power, so it wasn't suited for use over a long period of time. On this setting, the motor would probably burn out after 30 minutes.

And strange settings like that could be found all over the place.

“What would you have to fight to damage the armor like this and require settings like these…”

There were a lot of strange points regarding the armor.

There were parts of the hardware that showed signs of wear and tear, and somehow Kiriha's gauntlet had been integrated with the left arm. Damage from combat and heat was all over the armor. And the software had a lot of strange settings.

Did he repeatedly fight against a large and mobile weapon over a long period of time?

Ruth reached a conclusion upon overlooking the armor. With this kind of damage, it was hard to believe that Koutarou had only fought against Clan.

It looked like wear and tear accumulated over several months of fighting on the front, and the damage was from fighting a large and mobile weapon. And assuming the strange parameters were for fighting that weapon, it would make sense.

If recordings of what happened had remained the mystery would be solved, but those had all been erased. And that left Ruth feeling impatient.

“Satomi-sama and Clan-sama are definitely hiding something…”

Koutarou and Clan's relations was yet another of Ruth's concerns. If Koutarou was recruited by Clan, Theia's future would be shrouded in dark clouds. In order to prevent that, Ruth wanted to investigate what they were hiding.

“Oh? This is…”

That was when Ruth's eyes stopped in front of a setting item. It was the software for the translating device built into the armor.

“That's strange… the processing priority for old Forthorthe has been brought up to the top… and ancient Forthorthe has been set as the fourth priority… Why would such a special language…?”

The translation device in the armor and Ruth's bracelet could convert language between Japanese and Forthorthe. If Ruth spoke using Forthorthe words, the device would translate it into Japanese while preserving her voice, and it would also do the opposite. It was thanks to that device that Ruth and Theia could live on Earth without an inconvenience.

Given enough time, the device would be able to translate any language, but known languages had been pre-registered and there was no need to gather data. This included common Forthorthe and the language spoken in nearby star systems. And amongst those languages was also old Forthorthe and ancient Forthorthe.

However, old Forthorthe which was used over 1000 years ago, and ancient Forthorthe which was only used for ceremonies back then, were rarely ever used. It was normal for those

languages to be placed very low on the priority list when trying to figure out what language someone is speaking. Despite that, they had been raised up to the top. This was proof that the language was being used frequently and the computer had raised its priority to improve efficiency.

“Normally common Forthorthe should be at the top… but old Forthorthe is the top priority… Why was Satomi-sama speaking that…?”

Koutarou and Clan had gone missing, and in order to return they had needed to work together. In that case, common Forthorthe which Clan spoke should have remained as the top priority language. Despite that it, was now set to old Forthorthe. This made no sense to Ruth.

“The only reason I can think for this is…”

Koutarou hadn't been speaking common Forthorthe but old Forthorthe.

And in order to hide that, he had asked Clan to erase the data.

Ruth racked her brain to come up with a logical explanation for that.

“I see, could it be that Satomi-sama and Clan-sama…!”

There was only a single answer that was compatible with this mysterious situation.

It was hard to believe, but Ruth believed in what her intuition was telling her. At first something extraordinary would have had happened, but after that everything would make sense.

“There's no time to spare!”

Ruth hurriedly brought up the armor's communication history. Having caught on to the truth, there was someone she just had to speak to.

Ruth vs Clan

Thursday, February 11

Ruth came to visit the Cradle after school the following day.

Koutarou's armor had Clan registered in its communication device. Using that, Ruth had made a promise to speak with Clan the next day.

“So, what was this important thing you wanted to talk about?”

Clan erased the hologram floating around her and adjusted her glasses while slightly irritated. She had been doing research up until Ruth arrived and she was displeased at having to interrupt that. Clan wanted to keep it short so that she could get back to her research.

“There is only one thing I wanted to talk about.”

Hurrying the discussion along was just what Ruth wanted as well and she brought up her business while staring at Clan.

“It's about what Clan-sama and Satomi-sama are hiding.”

“T-There's nothing that we are hiding.”

Clan's expression changed repeatedly. At first she was irritated, before being surprised and then hurriedly showing a calm expression.

As I thought, there's no doubt that they are hiding something…

That was how Ruth interpreted Clan's change in expression. It looked like she was taken aback by something unexpected before hurriedly trying to smooth it over.

“I have proof.”

“There's no way such a thing exists.”

As Clan said that, she turned her back on Ruth.

The data has all been erased. Pardomshiha is only making wild guesses. There is no way that there is any proof left…

Clan took several small breaths from an angle Ruth couldn't see to calm herself down and turned back to Ruth with a confident smile.

“Because we are not hiding anything.”

Clan had promised Koutarou to keep what happened in Forthorthe a secret, because that would keep the current Forthorthe from getting confused and be less of a bother. And there was also a large advantage for Clan. Because of this promise, Clan was the closest to Signaltin. She was well aware of what was most valuable, an empress or a princess wielding Signaltin. And Clan wasn't kind enough to give up this overwhelming advantage on her own accord.

“The first proof is that you invited me onboard your ship, Clan-sama.”

However, Ruth didn't flinch in front of the confident Clan. She carefully observed Clan's reaction while speaking.

“What?”

This was once again an unexpected point, and Clan's expression instinctively changed to that of a surprised one. Ruth burned Clan's reactions into her mind as this was also an important clue.

“Just half a month ago, you were trying to kill us, Clan-sama. Despite that, you didn't reject my request to speak with you. And even as we face each other now, you haven't tried to kill me. Why is that?”

“That's…”

Clan stumbled for an answer.

She wasn't attacking Theia or the others because she had the Blue Knight and Signaltin in her hands. They were more useful than the rights to the throne, so attacking Theia had lost all meaning. And now, Koutarou was someone she had shared joys and sorrows with. She had no intention of harming his friend Ruth.

However, she couldn't reveal that. Troubled, she tried to keep her expression from changing while racking her brain.

“That is because I have realized that there is a suitable way to win as a princess. I decided that if I am going to get in Theiamillis-san's way I will do so boldly. A true princess will face any challenge without cheating.”

Fortunately, she was able to come up with those words.

Things have turned quite troublesome…

Clan took a breath of relief upon escaping Ruth's pursuit, while not letting her guard down.

“Then why do you still remain on this planet, Clan-sama? Right now you are not boldly facing her highness, nor are you returning to Forthorthe. So just what are you doing here?”

Ruth lashed onto what Clan had said and pushed even harder.

“Tha…”

This was once more a difficult question to answer.

Clan remained on Earth to study Signaltin. And also to persuade Koutarou to become her own vassal.

Of course she couldn't just say that, so she once again racked her brain.

“That's because I'm making a weapon to fight Theiamillis-san. Once it's completed, I plan on challenging her with the rights to the throne on the line.”

“That's a lie, isn't it.”

Ruth narrowed her eyes. Her voice was chilling. She knew that those words were lies.

“I-It's not a l-lie!”

Clan was shaken and her voice was hollow. Hearing that, Ruth realized it was her chance and attacked.

“If you are planning to boldly attack her, why haven't you called back Hazy Moon? That ship should have more machinery suited to develop a weapon. What reason would you have to continue your development on this tiny ship?”

Clan was currently using the small spaceship known as the Cradle. This was originally an all-purpose spaceship that was installed in her personal space battleship, the Hazy Moon. The sensors and observation equipment onboard the Cradle were advanced, so it was enough to study Signaltin, but it didn't have a lot of facilities to create a weapon. For that, calling back the Hazy Moon from Forthorthe would be the best choice.

“I-I don't have to answer you that!”

Not even Clan could evade this pursuit. She couldn't think of a reason for why she hadn't called back Hazy Moon if she was going to fight Theia. Not answering the question was all she could do.

There's no mistaking it. Clan-sama and Satomi-sama are hiding a very important secret!

Convinced by Clan's reaction, she produced her last question to deal the finishing blow.

“Then let me change my question… What did you and Satomi-sama fight in the past Forthorthe?”

This question was Ruth's trump card. All the questions up until now had been to shake Clan. The answer to this question was what Ruth wanted to know most.

“W-Why do you know that!?”

Clan completely fell for Ruth's trap and instinctively spat out those words.

“So it really is!?”

Upon seeing Clan's reaction, Ruth's expression lit up. Meanwhile Clan put her hands in front of her mouth to silence herself.

O-Oh no!? She tricked me!

That was practically the same as admitting that they travelled to the past. It was a fatal mistake.

“The translation device on Satomi-sama's armor had given priority to old Forthorthe! If it's not used daily, it wouldn't surpass common Forthorthe! That's why I started suspecting that it just might be the case, but… to think it really was true…”

By combining the state of the translation device and other tidbits, Ruth had reached this conclusion. And once she had shaken up Clan sufficiently, she had hit her with this question out of nowhere. The effect was superb and Clan instinctively confessed. Though while she had suspected it, the answer still surprised her.

I see, the priority of the translation device! I didn't think that far!

Clan had erased that data like Koutarou had asked, but she didn't think to go as far as the priority list of various devices on the armor. She didn't expect the tidbits gained from examining those could lead anyone to the answer. Rather than this being a miss on Clan's side, this was a sign of Ruth's excellence.

“Clan-sama, please tell me. Where did the two of you go and what did you do?”

At this point, all Ruth really knew was that the two had used old Forthorthe in that age and that they had fought something there. She wanted to know what that was. Any problems Koutarou might have might become Theia and Ruth's problems in the future, so it was a problem of utmost importance.

“…I don't know what you are talking about.”

Having been found out, Clan had instead regained her calmness.

It's not like Pardomshiha has reached the truth. In that case, it might be prudent to give her some of the truth to satisfy her and get her to leave…

Clan quickly gathered her thoughts and smiled at Ruth. Meanwhile Ruth got excited and pursued her.

“Please don't evade the question, Clan-sama! It is quite clearly the truth based on your appearance just a moment ago!”

“I am not evading the question. And even if it's as you say, and me and Koutarou really did travel to the past Forthorthe, do you think I could just honestly admit that?”

Ruth vs Clan

“W-What do you mean!?”

Having gotten closer to the truth of the matter, Ruth had lost the calmness she had before. Clan on the other hand had been able to calm down, and their positions had now changed.

“It is quite clear. If we admit to travelling to the past, it would be the same as admitting that we interfered with the past. And that could lead to a very serious problem that would shake the very foundation of the royal families of Forthorthe.”

“T-That's…”

Ruth stumbled on her words. She understood what Clan was trying to say.

Koutarou and Clan hadn't changed the past. There were small changes, but it was mostly the same as before. But publicly admitting that they had travelled to the past, it would create a doubt that the royal families were established through a change in history. And having that doubt spread through Forthorthe would be far from good.

“So regardless of the truth, I cannot answer. Koutarou and I have not travelled to past Forthorthe.”

“Kuh…”

Ruth ground her teeth. Though she took one step closer to the truth, she couldn't reach all the way in the end. That frustration was far from small.

This is all I can tell you, Pardomshiha. Accept this and leave…

Clan carefully observed Ruth. This was a difficult part that required precise judgment.

“I-I understand…”

In the end, Ruth gave up on pursuing the matter any further. She understood that Clan wouldn't answer anything else.

“But, tell me one last thing.”

“What?”

“While the two of you were gone, was Satomi-sama’s behavior suitable for a knight?”

Even then, there was something Ruth just needed to know. That was if Koutarou had stayed true to himself. That was actually what Ruth really wanted to know, and she wasn't really that interested in what happened in the past.

Thank you, Pardomshiha…

Clan secretly let out a large sigh of relief and smiled at Ruth. It was a rare pure smile, void of both hostility and malice.

“Rest easy, Pardomshiha. Koutarou remained true to the path of a knight from the start to the finish.”

“I, see…”

Ruth's shoulders dropped. She had been able to confirm what she wanted to know the most, but the truth was still shrouded in darkness. Ruth was very disappointed, and Clan understood that as well. She began to feel sorry for Ruth.

When did I become this nice…

While confused about herself, Clan called out to Ruth.

“Pardomshiha, since you did come over, I can't just let you leave empty handed. So in return I'll tell you something good.”

Ruth vs Clan

“Clan-sama…?”

Ruth raised her head and her eyes opened wide in surprise. She was deeply surprised by this action completely unlike Clan.

Don't make such a face! I am well aware that I am being strange!

While complaining about Ruth's surprise, Clan chose what information she had would be of most use to Ruth.

“Pardomshiha, you currently have an arranged marriage, do you not?”

“Yes… you were aware of it?”

Ruth's eyes opened wide once more, she didn't expect to hear Clan speaking of her arranged marriage.

“Yes. Since I am after Theiamillis-san, I hold such information as well.”

“I don't really know what to say about that…”

Ruth smiled wryly. Just a while ago, she had felt like she was standing in front of an enemy, but now she had started to lower her guard. The change that had taken place in Clan was being conveyed to Ruth as well.

“More importantly, you should be careful about that arranged marriage.”

“Be careful? What do you mean by that?”

“DKI is planning on expanding into the military section.”

“The military section!?”

That was a keyword that struck a chord with Ruth.

DKI was a general company but they hadn't stepped into the military section yet. That's why they were on good terms with Theia's mother and the current empress, Elfaria, who advocated disarmament and that was a big point when it came to choosing Ruth's fiancé.

But if they were planning on expanding into the military sections, Elexis's push for marriage took on a different meaning.

“Is that true!?”

“It's true. It can't be helped that Pardomshiha's intelligence division doesn't have that information. The Schweiger family has made several advancements in the science field, so information regarding the military naturally gathers there.”

The Schweiger family that Clan was from had produced a lot of exceptional scientists over generations. As a result, their ties with the military naturally grew stronger. Rather than siding with the Mastir family who advocated disarmament, they would be able to expand their power if they sided with the scientific Schweiger family. As a result, when the military learned that Clan had headed towards Earth to get in Theia's way, they began leaking information that would benefit both sides. That included information regarding DKI's future.

“Elexis wants to expand into the military section to make his corporation larger. But if a corporation just expanded into the military section without any results, nobody would be very interested. So they decided to hang the Pardomshiha family as bait for the military. And you understand the rest, don't you?”

As Clan said that and dropped her shoulders, Ruth's face paled.

“If they expand into the military section after our marriage, a crack would occur between the Pardomshiha and Mastir families!?”

“And in return, the military promised to give DKI a large scale job. It is quite a deal.”

After obtaining a large amount of influence after marrying Ruth and gaining the Pardomshiha name, they would eventually cooperate with the military. Elexis had nothing to lose from marrying Ruth. If the military doesn't uphold their end of the deal, he could just continue operating like before. In that case, the advocation of disarmament would only end up getting more momentum, so the military had no choice but to accept Elexis's proposal. It was a splendid business scheme that lived up to his reputation as a competent manager.

“Then there shouldn't be any problems in declining this arranged marriage, right?”

Ruth was already planning on declining, but if the entire marriage was a trap there would be no problem.

“Normally that would be the case. But I am wondering why Elexis was hurrying up to meet with you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that Elexis's sudden visit might be an excuse to bring the military to this planet. And if you look like you're about to decline, they might come up with some excuse to split you two apart, and while you're gone, it's possible that Theiamillis-san will have an unfortunate accident.”

“You can't be—”

When declining the arranged marriage, Ruth was planning on temporarily returning to Forthorthe. And during that time, the military might attack Theia using the forces on Elexis's ship. After that, they could announce that she had been slaughtered by the lowly barbarian earthlings, or they could hold her prisoner and use her as a card against Elfaria.

“Are you saying that could happen!?”

“…It's just a possibility.”

Clan implied that Theia would be attacked, but she believed that the chances of her being captured were higher. Since they had gone out of their way to let Clan know about Elexis, it could be interpreted as a signal that the military would do something even if she stayed put.

“Oh no, her highness!”

Ruth swiftly decided to hurry back to Theia. She had to reduce the dangers regarding Theia.

“I'll give you my thanks later, Clan-sama!”

The normally polite and formal Ruth left with very little in the way of greetings.

“There is no need to worry. It's just a little gift.”

Meanwhile, Clan watched over her in a composed manner and let out a small sigh.

“Haaaah… For some reason I just keep ending up helping Bertorion… was I really this nice?”

Clan ordered her bracelet to open up the comms.

Koutarou's Truth

Part 1

Thursday, February 11

Koutarou had just finished his club activities and was now headed towards Clan's hideout. There was something he wanted to ask her.

This matter was regarding Ruth's marriage. Since he wasn't informed of how the situation was like in the current Forthorthe, he couldn't be of any help to Ruth. He decided to go to Clan to learn more.

“Really, only your personality needs to be sly. You should live someplace brighter and more beautiful, Clan.”

Koutarou complained as he walked up a dark mountain path. Clan's spaceship had been hidden in a mountain area where it wouldn't stand out. And when the day turned dark, it was a rough path to travel.

“Oh yeah, now that I think about it, didn't this bracelet have a flashlight installed into it?”

Koutarou brought the bracelet on his right arm to up to his face. Though he had gotten it from Clan, it should function like Theia and Ruth's. The bracelet had all kinds of convenient functions, one of which was a flashlight.

“Hey, Cradle.”

“You called, my lord.”

When Koutarou called out to the bracelet, the crystal in it began glowing and a hologram of Clan's spaceship appeared in his vision.

Just like Theia and Ruth's bracelets were connected to the Blue Knight, this bracelet was connected to the Cradle. The original function of the bracelet was something similar to a remote control.

“It's dark so—”

“Bertorion.”

And just when Koutarou was about to order the bracelet to turn on the lights, the hologram of the spaceship was replaced with Clan's serious face. It was a call from her.

“…When I'm about to turn on the light because it's dark, a sly face appeared.”

“I really will shoot you with real bullets, Bertorion!”

“There's no need to get so mad. It was just a little greeting.”

“What an unpleasant greeting!”

“Clan, your cute face is being wasted.”

“C-Can I kill you…? I haven't had the urge to kill in a while now…”

The hologram of Clan was shaking her fist in front of her face in rage.

“More importantly, did you want something?”

“Again with the dismissive comment… geeeez! There's something I wanted to talk about!”

“I'm on my way to your place right now, so can't we just talk there?”

“It's important, that's why I called you!”

“Then hurry up and speak.”

Koutarou's Truth

“This is all your fault you know! Really…”

Clan regained her composure and looked at Koutarou with a serious expression.

“Sorry, Clan. What happened?”

“…That part about you is so unfair.”

Clan finally told Koutarou about Ruth's visit.

Part 2

“Her highness's position marker is just up ahead!”

Using the information displayed on her bracelet, Ruth was heading towards a public park. It was a vast forest park rich in nature that was loved by the inhabitants of Kitsushouharukaze city.

Theia had taken over for Ruth, who was going to be preparing for the dinner, and was guiding Elexis around on Earth. Upon examining Theia's location history, Theia had indeed been guiding him to sightseeing spots around the city. And finally, Theia was for some reason headed this way. But this was an odd spot to be travelling towards as the sun was starting to set. What was even stranger was that even though she had tried to contact Theia, she couldn't get a connection. After entering the park, Theia's position marker had stopped updating.

It could just be a simple system error, but Ruth was preparing for the worst case scenario.

“Your highness, please be safe!”

They were the cases where if Elexis and the military were planning something like what Clan had said or where the military had already learned that Ruth was going to decline in some way.

Even if I decline, there is a chance that I won't have to leave Earth! If there really is an underlying plot, then there is no way that they haven't accounted for that possibility! In that case, they must have prepared to strike regardless of where I was! I was careless!

The most efficient way to capture Theia was to strike when Ruth wasn't nearby. That's because it would be easier if there were no witnesses from Forthorthe.

Though there was a chance of Ruth leaving Earth if she declined the marriage, it wasn't foolproof. And since relying on a plan that relied on uncertain elements was foolish, there was a need for a more certain plan.

That's why El-sama suddenly came to Earth! It was to create an opening!

If her fiancé suddenly appeared, Ruth was sure to be shaken, even by just a little. And because it was just the two of them, the extra work would naturally reduce Ruth's guard around Theia.

Thinking back, just the two of us leaving might have all been part of this plan! I should have spent more time considering the meaning of this situation!

Ruth wanted all of these to just be her needless worries, but the ominous feeling she was getting wouldn't stop. She couldn't think of it as just a simple system error. The only grounds she had to suspect anything were the words of Clan, who had been her enemy just the other day. But what Clan had said had sounded like the truth. And based on Koutarou and Clan's current relationship, she couldn't imagine that Clan would be lying.

If it hadn't been for Clan-sama, it might have been too late… Though it's mortifying, Clan-sama is in a much closer place to Satomi-sama than I am…

Koutarou and Clan had a secret that they hadn't revealed to Theia and Ruth. That fact increased the reliability of Clan's words, while at the same time, left Ruth feeling a little envious of her.

Part 3

Just after Ruth had jumped into the public park—

“Oh my, if it isn't Ruth-sama. Good evening.”

Elexis appeared in front of Ruth. He bowed gracefully while wearing a confident smile.

“El-sama!?”

Ruth on the other hand showed a severe expression. And as Ruth instinctively took a stance, Elexis's expression changed it one of worry.

“Is something the matter, Ruth-sama?”

“Where is her highness!?”

“If it's her highness you are looking for, we separated over there.”

As Elexis said that he pointed out the area behind him. The paved road continued deeper into the park, but it wasn't possible to see further up ahead due to the darkness and trees completely concealing the path. And since it seemed that this darkness was also concealing Theia. Ruth was overcome by an unspeakable uneasiness.

“I was just planning on returning to the ship. That's right, why don't you come with me? There are so many things I would like to show you there.”

In contrast Ruth, Elexis had a bright smile and invited her in a normal fashion.

“That is alright. I have an urgent matter to discuss with her highness, so I will take my leave.”

Ruth turned the invitation down and attempted to calm down the unease brewing inside her as she tried to walk past Elexis. She wanted everything to just be her imagination.

“Oh don't say that.”

However, Elexis grabbed a hold of Ruth's arm as she tried to pass him.

“I would love for you to come with me, Ruth-sama.”

Elexis forcibly pulled Ruth back.

“Kyaaa!?”

Because of her light weight, she was easily swung around and returned to the place she had stood. However, even though what had just happened, Ruth courageously denounced Elexis.

“What is the meaning of this, El-sama!?”

“Why, it's all for the future—”

A boom was heard. Elexis cut himself off in the middle of a sentence. It seemed like an explosion had occurred in the park, and Elexis turned in its direction. The sound had come from deeper into the park. From Ruth's current location, she couldn't see the explosion, but she could see the sky brighten for a moment, and crows were rapidly fleeing from the scene.

“Your highness!”

Ruth's intuition told her that this explosion was a sign of Theia in danger. At the same time, the explosion made Elexis remove the mask he was wearing.

“Really, I gave them such strict orders not to use their weapons… her highness Theiamillis sure is quite impressive.”

While being amazed at his subordinates’ clumsiness, he admired Theia's struggling.

Koutarou's Truth

The five bodyguards that Elexis had brought with him were in reality a special forces unit from the army. Of course they had all gone through rigorous training, but they were forced to use their weapons to capture Theia. For Elexis, that merited some praise.

After an explosion had occurred, it would be hard to continue fooling Ruth, so Elexis decided to remove his mask.

“To think she'd make the special forces use heavy weaponry… if she's that strong, why is she advocating disarmament…”

“El-sama, so you really are…!?”

“Oh, so you were aware of our plans. Splendid. Though still young, as expected from a daughter from the Pardomshiha family.”

Elexis smiled at Ruth with a confident smile. It was an awfully natural smile, as if saying that this was just another normal day in his life.

“Let go of me, you coward! Are you so hungry for power that you'd even go this far!?”

Ruth's face was flushed in rage as she tried to shake off Elexis' hand.

“What a foolish question. Without power, one can't do anything. I imagine you would realize that right about now.”

However, with such a large difference in physique, Ruth was no match for Elexis's strength. Despite Ruth's struggles, Elexis wasn't budging an inch.

“You'd even go so far as to make needless charitable undertakings, just for this!?”

All Ruth was able to do right now was criticizing Elexis.

“That hurts. Those generous donations were most certainly my real intentions. Large profits are born from a healthy society… I simply felt that if I sided with Elfaria, I wouldn't be able to create a perfect society. That's all.”

It wasn't like Elexis harbored malice against Ruth or Theia. It was just that since he didn't agree with the current politics of Forthorthe, so he had sided with their enemy. That was all there was to it.

“So you're going to demand that Elfaria-sama abdicates by holding her highness hostage!? This is no joke!”

“I agree. However, the royal families are the ones who have given all the political power to themselves, so this is the only way. As such it is only fair that she becomes our hostage.”

“I won't let you say you have forgotten just what sacrifices the Mastir family has made to support Forthorthe!”

“I haven't forgotten. However, times have changed. If a part rusts, you have to replace it. Isn't that just logical?”

“Nonsense! Blue Knight, Anti-Personnel Stunner!”

Realizing that she wouldn't be able to beat him in power, Ruth shouted an order into her bracelet. She was going to the Blue Knight's weapon systems to incapacitate Elexis.

“That won't work, Ruth-sama.”

“The network connection has been lost. That instruction cannot be executed.”

“Wha!?”

Koutarou's Truth

The bracelet didn't accept the order as usual. Instead, it let out a jarring warning sound and reported that it was unable to carry out the instructions.

“Why!?”

The unexpected development made Ruth's expression stiffen.

“It was a mistake to let us onboard the Blue Knight.”

“I see, so that's when—!”

“Without weapons, both you and her highness are just girls. You never stood a chance.”

Elexis regrettably shook his head. He personally held no ill intentions towards the girls; that was why he seriously pitied Ruth.

“Your only way to not lose would have been to marry me, but in the end, you probably would have lost then too…”

When Elexis had first arrived at the Blue Knight, his five subordinates had set up all kinds of devices on the ship. That allowed them to freely jam communications, wiretap Theia and Ruth's private rooms, and more.

Having learned of Ruth's feelings, Elexis decided on capturing Theia in this empty park. However as he learned that Ruth was approaching, Elexis had left Theia to his subordinates and went out to slow down Ruth.

Theia and Ruth's chances of winning were thrown out the window the moment they failed to notice the devices on their ship.

“Blue Knight, Blue Knight!”

Ruth operated her bracelet and tried all kinds of communication methods to contact the Blue Knight, such as electronic, gravitational and hyperspace communications. However, all she got back was the warning sound from her bracelet. The Blue Knight didn't respond to Ruth despite her best attempts.

“Just give it up. Communications have been completely jammed. Nothing you do will help. Your voice won't reach anyone. Just stop and obey me, please.”

Elexis looked at Ruth with pity in his eyes. That pity had come from his absolute conviction of his own victory.

“If I give up, who else will save her highness!? As if I could ever do that! I am her highness's knight after all!”

“To think you can't understand that it's useless… that is regrettable.”

Seeing as Ruth was refusing to give up, Elexis decided to swing his fist. He would knock her unconscious and bring her onboard his own spaceship. Ruth would allow him to make Theia obey.

“Is that so? It wasn't useless.”

However, Ruth wasn't the one struck by a fist. Elexis was. A fist from out of his line of sight struck his cheek.

Having taken a direct hit, Elexis collapsed. At the same time, he lost strength in the hand holding onto Ruth and she regained her freedom. As she turned and looked at the person who had punched Elexis, Ruth's eyes suddenly sparkled.

“Satomi-sama!?”

“Yo, Ruth-san. Your voice reached me.”

Koutarou's Truth

Koutarou had been the one to punch Elexis. After hearing the situation from Clan, he had gone out looking for Ruth.

You were a big help, Clan…

Since Koutarou's bracelet was connected to Clan's Cradle and Hazy Moon, he couldn't access Ruth and Theia's location. However, thanks to Ruth using various communication methods, Clan's unmanned observation device managed to determine her location. Clan then conveyed that to Koutarou and led him to the park. Koutarou had only been able to find her because Ruth had refused to give up until the end.

“So Ruth-san, what is going on?”

Koutarou glared at Elexis without letting his guard down and clenched his fists. Elexis had taken some damage from the blow, but he was still conscious. And after lightly shaking his head, he slowly stood up.

“Satomi-sama…”

Seeing Koutarou step in between her and Elexis, Ruth was filled with a deep sense of security.

Ah… he really is the one… As long as he is with me, I will be okay no matter what… He will definitely be able to save her highness…

The crisis hadn't been resolved, and she had no grounds for her beliefs, but Ruth felt relieved and believed that everything would be okay now. She believed in Koutarou, and after wiping away tears from her eyes, she converted those feelings into words.

“Please, lend me your strength, Satomi-sama! I want to save her highness! From all kinds of enemies! And from all kinds of hardships!”

That was the future that would make Ruth the happiest, and it was also her wish.

She no longer had any doubts.

“As you wish, my lady!”

Koutarou responded without any hesitation.

He was able to do so because he had made his resolution a long time ago.

Part 4

After standing up, Elexis had lost his previous calmness. The unexpected interruption had thrown him off his game.

“Curse you… you primitive barbarian…”

Looking at it from Elexis's perspective, it was like a gorilla was interrupting his duel and punched him. Elexis gave Koutarou a glare full of rage.

“Hm…? Hahahaha!”

However, Koutarou began to laugh.

Koutarou was laughing because he had met a person very similar to Elexis. And finding himself in a similar situation as back then, he began laughing even harder. It was obvious that it was a completely different person, but their features were just so similar that Koutarou couldn't keep it in.

“…What are you doing in a place like this, Dextro? You haven't taken a single step forward for 2,000 years…”

As Koutarou laughed, he mumbled to himself in a low voice.

“Dextro…?”

So only Ruth who was next to him could hear it.

Satomi-sama just said Dextro…

Ruth had a vague memory of having heard the name Dextro before. He was a character that appeared in the legend of the Blue Knight. However, he hadn't appeared in Theia's play in the interest of time. So it wasn't a name Koutarou could have known.

Maybe her highness showed him a movie when practicing for the play…?

However, in the end Ruth assumed he had been shown a movie regarding him, and so she turned her focus back on Elexis. She didn't have the time to think of something else.

“What are you mumbling about, neanderthal?”

“Neanderthal? It's been a while since I last heard that.”

Clan, that synchronicity of yours might really exist…

Koutarou remembered what Clan had said and casually approached Elexis. Elexis pulled out a pistol and pointed it towards Koutarou. It was a new model that DKI had developed, and not only did it have little recoil, but it was also a multipurpose gun with the option to load all kinds of bullets. This was one of the products that DKI wanted to sell to the army.

“What does an unarmed neanderthal want?”

An amazed smile appeared on Elexis's lips. It was only obvious that he would smile as white, transparent hexagonal tiles appeared around him. It was a barrier. A bare-handed human wouldn't be able to do anything against him now.

“It's true that I am unarmed, but you shouldn't get too ahead of yourself.”

“That's true. There's a saying in my family to not play around during important events.”

Elexis didn't hesitate to fire towards Koutarou's head.

Looks like you learned a little, Dextro!

However, Koutarou shook his head and dodged the bullet.

Koutarou's Truth

“What!?”

Elexis doubted his eyes. He couldn't believe that this gun could miss at close range.

In order to improve the accuracy of Elexis's gun, it didn't fire by pulling a trigger. Instead it sensed the pressure put on the trigger. It reduced the lowered accuracy from having to move your finger and trigger.

In other words, Koutarou couldn't have observes Elexis's movements to dodge. It should be impossible for a human to dodge.

“Your shooting is too honest!”

Koutarou began sprinting to close the distance as quickly as possible.

“Who the hell are you!?”

“I'm the victim!”

Meanwhile, Elexis continued firing. However none of the bullets hit; instead they would graze his cheek, pass under the arm he had casually raised or between his arm and body.

It was a bizarre sight that made it look like Elexis was missing on purpose.

Why, why can't I hit him!?

Elexis started to panic as he continued firing. It was a situation in which the person shooting was the most confused.

Koutarou was able to dodge the bullets thanks to power he had gotten from Sanae. Elexis's aim was very accurate, and the so was the gun’s performance. He didn't have any hesitation like Ruth, and his aim was logical and accurate. That's why his attacks were easier to dodge than anyone else’s.

“A victim you say!?”

“That's right! I'm just a regular civilian that your princess invaded!”

Koutarou was now right in front of Elexis. Elexis fired one last shot at Koutarou.

However, that bullet flew in a completely different direction. Koutarou's fist struck Elexis in the face and knocked him back onto the ground. The shot had been fired after Koutarou had hit him and he was falling.

“W-What happened!?”

After falling down, Elexis was unable to move. Part of the reason for that was because he was dizzy from the punch, but most of the reason was because he was taken aback in surprise.

Despite being protected by a barrier, Koutarou had punched him. Elexis had no clue what had happened.

“Satomi-sama… you…”

Ruth who had been watching Koutarou from behind on the other saw what happened. Despite having seen it, she was still surprised.

Immediately before El-sama fires, the barrier near the barrel vanishes for a moment! Satomi-sama punched him during that small window! I understand the theory, but just because you understand the theory, it's not that easy to put it into practice! Just how much training would you have to do to be able to pull off something like that!?

That was a move made possible by the power given to him by Sanae and from his combat experience. Elexis had a habit when he fired his gun. Just before shooting he, would hold his

breath, and that showed in his aura. Koutarou's experience told him that was a common trait amongst marksmen. So by swinging his fist at that time, he would be able to strike Elexis before he could fire his gun.

“Ouch, the barrier recovers quickly.”

While Ruth seemed surprised, Koutarou was shaking his right hand in an attempt to ease the pain. That was because he had been repelled by the reformed barrier, but his actions were so carefree that it was hard to believe he had just easily done something so amazing.

“I see, Neanderthal-kun, you aimed for the opening when the barrier was down!”

That was when Elexis realized what had happened. The tactical support computer on him reported on what Koutarou had done.

“But now that I know, there's no need to fear!”

Elexis ejected the magazine loaded into the gun and quickly exchanged it with another.

“All I have to do is attack you with lasers without lowering the barrier!”

The new magazine contained miniature irradiation devices that fired lasers. And by loading those into the pistol, it would be able to shoot lasers. Since it was a prototype, there was a limit to the amount of shots it could fire, but this generality was the selling point of the gun.

“You've surprised me quite a bit, but it looks like I win, Neanderthal-kun!”

After changing his magazine, Elexis ordered the computer to change the barrier settings. Normally, Forthorthe's protective barriers guarded against lasers as well. But Elexis changed that setting to allow lasers to pass through. That meant that he could fire at Koutarou without having to lower his barrier.

“Let me tell you something good.”

“Is this your will? I'm no knight, but I'll at least hear your final words.”

Pointing his gun at Koutarou, Elexis waited for his words. He was absolutely certain of his victory now.

“Unarmed, I have no way of breaking your barrier, and you can attack me all you want. All I can do is run around, but I won't be able to save Theia like that.”

“That's right. You can at least understand that.”

“However—”

Koutarou began running towards Elexis once more.

“Did you get so desperate as to resort to a suicide attack? I guess that is only fitting for a neanderthal.”

Elexis confidently kept his aim at Koutarou. He had no need to defeat Koutarou with this attack. He only needed to buy time, he only had to not lose. There was no chance that an unarmed opponent could break through the barrier. Elexis had been a little surprised over getting punched, but he was still dominant.

“Satomi-sa— Ah…”

At first, Ruth had thought that Koutarou was throwing his life away too. But then she noticed that Koutarou was smiling. It was the exact same kind of smile he would show when he was teasing Yurika.

“—my partner is the slyest of them all.”

Koutarou's Truth

Before Elexis could fire, several lights came pouring down from above.

The lights passed through his barrier and struck the gun in his right hand, and the barrier generator on his waist and destroyed them.

“W-What!?”

Elexis was once again taken aback by surprise as the unexpected happened. However, he didn't have much time to be surprised as Koutarou swung his fist down at full force. Without his gun and barrier, Elexis had no way to defend himself and standing still, he was just an easy target.

“Guhah.”

Koutarou's fist buried into Elexis's stomach, and he easily fainted.

Part 5

Having defeated Elexis, Koutarou and Ruth headed deeper into the park while being guided by Clan. While Koutarou was fighting, she had managed to identify the heat sources corresponding to Theia and the five men using her observation device.

“This is as much as I can help. I can't leave any evidence that the Schweiger family was involved.”

If Clan did anything more, there was a high chance that Elexis and the military would find out that she was helping them. This was where her turn ended.

“Thanks, Clan.”

“You just keep owing me more and more, Koutarou.”

“I know, I know.”

“Thank you very much, Clan-sama.”

“Why am I being thanked by Pardomshiha, geez…”

Since Clan wasn't used to associating with people, she was troubled by having someone she wasn't used to thanking her. Dealing with her was not the same as dealing with Koutarou. As a result, the hologram of Clan, created by the bracelet, blushed ever so slightly.

“…I'm confused myself.”

Ruth put her hand on her chest and smiled gently. Ruth's earnest feelings seemed to have an effect on Clan as she smiled embarrassingly.

“One last warning, Koutarou. DKI are trying to sell weapons far more powerful than that gun to the army.”

“So what should I do?”

“I would 'use any method we can.’”

“I understand. Thank you.”

By quoting Koutarou, Clan conveyed the magnitude of the situation to Koutarou. He pulled himself together and began thinking in preparation to the upcoming fight. Seeing Koutarou get so serious, Clan smiled gently.

“…You came back through all those hardships, now protect her until the end, Satomi Koutarou.”

Saying that, Clan terminated the hologram. At the same time, the observation headed back towards the Cradle. The rest was up to Koutarou and Ruth.

Part 6

Not long after Clan had vanished, Koutarou and Ruth reached their destination. There they saw scorched trees and traces of explosions. The sight told them that the fight that had taken place here was fierce.

“Her highness is… there! She's over there, Satomi-sama!”

“Theia.”

A bit away from Koutarou and Ruth, past some trees, was a spaceship even smaller than Clan's Cradle. It was about the size of a large truck. Right next to the ship were the five men, and they were carrying Theia. She seemed to be unconscious and one of the men were carrying her over his shoulder. Theia looked like a doll being carried by the large man.

“Oh no, if we don't hurry they'll take her away!”

“So there's no time for petty tricks, huh…”

Theia would be stuffed into the spaceship any time now. If they just stood around and waited, she would be taken away. However, Koutarou and Ruth only had the weapons for self-defense that Clan had left behind. They couldn't use any powerful weapons that would tip the men of that Clan was involved. So facing five men from a special forces team with cutting edge technology would be difficult. They had been able to do something about Elexis because he was on his own, but not even Koutarou could dodge all attacks if the five men decided to attack him with lasers at the same time.

They had to go right now, but they stood no chance of winning as it was. There was no time to call for backup, and having reached a standstill, Koutarou mumbled the words Clan had mentioned.

“Use any method we can, huh…”

They were the words that Koutarou spoken when facing off against Maxfern. Just like now, back then they were also at a standstill. So Koutarou had told Clan to be ready to use their last resort. That's what using any method meant.

Back then, Clan's last resort was the super-space-time repulsion shell. Then what is my last resort…?

And when Koutarou had just reached that thought, Ruth spoke to him.

“Satomi-sama, I'll act as a decoy and draw them away. Meanwhile, please save her highness. I'm sure you can do it, so please, save her highness!”

Ruth couldn't wait any longer and quickly explained her plan. However it was a dangerous plan with almost no chance of Ruth surviving.

“Ruth-san…”

Koutarou definitely understood Ruth's determination. He didn't even need to look at her aura. It was obvious just with one look at her face.

Ruth is prepared to even die for this. She wants to save Theia, even if she were to die, because she would regret it if she didn't. Because she can't be happy without Theia…

“Here I go! I'll leave the rest to you!”

Ruth didn't fear her own death, because she knew that even if she died, Koutarou would definitely save Theia. And when faced with Ruth's determination, Koutarou made up his mind.

Koutarou's Truth

There's no meaning in keeping the secret if it will lead to Ruth's death. And I'm sure her majesty will forgive me for using it in this situation. It's for the sake of the people her majesty fought to protect after all!

Koutarou was prepared to use any means necessary to protect Ruth and Theia.

“…Please wait, Ruth-san.”

Koutarou grabbed a hold of Ruth's shoulder as she was about to rush forward and called her back.

“Satomi-sama?”

Having suddenly been stopped, Ruth gave Koutarou a puzzled glance.

“Ruth-san… if possible I'd like you not to mention what you'll see from now on to anyone else.”

Koutarou smiled at Ruth. It was his normal smile; though awkward, it was an earnest smile without anything hiding behind it. It was the smile Ruth loved to see.

“Satomi…sama?”

Ruth didn't understand the meaning behind Koutarou's smile so she instinctively questioned him. However, instead of answering her, Koutarou thrust his right hand forward.

“Cradle, give me my sword.”

“As you wish, my lord.”

The gem on the bracelet Koutarou was wearing blinked repeatedly and executed his order.

Satomi-sama's sword? Saguratin should be onboard the Blue Knight right now… And his face… I've never seen Satomi-sama with such an expression before…

It was the expression Koutarou made when he compelled himself to fight. This was the first time Ruth had ever seen him make that expression.

“Come, Signaltin.”

“Call sign confirmed, coordinate axis fixed. Commencing transfer of Signaltin.”

“Wha—?”

Before Ruth could even be surprised by the name of the sword Koutarou had whispered, the transfer had commenced.

Just in front of Koutarou's extended right hand, a black hole about ten centimeters in diameter appeared. From that hole, a sword still in its sheath appeared. The sword had a complex design that made use of many curves. The white and silver colors blended together and it looked as graceful as a work of art. Without hesitation, Koutarou stuck his hand into the black hole, grabbed a hold of the sword’s handle and pulled it out.

The moment Koutarou grabbed a hold of the handle, the sword began releasing a pure-white glow. The sword covered everything around it in light. It was almost as bright as the sun.

“What is this sword!? Alaia's crest is engraved on the handle! And the royal family's crest is engraved on the sheath!”

The most and second most famous crests were engraved into the sword. Those were the royal family's crest using the goddess of dawn as its motif and Alaia's personal crest using silvery white snow as its motif.

Despite the powerful white glow, the crests shone beautifully as if making their presence known.

Koutarou's Truth

“Your Excellency, Blue Knight, this ship, the Cradle, will pray for your fortune and glory in place of the nation of Forthorthe.”

“…Thank you.”

Koutarou was stood in the center of the light, holding the sword in both hands. In his right hand was the handle, and in his left the sheath. Koutarou turned back to Ruth and spoke out to her.

“Ruth-san.”

“Signal…tin? And Your Excellency, Blue Knight…?”

Ruth was unable to respond to Koutarou as she was just so surprised by this development.

It's a replica… no, it's too well made for that… and this light… and why did the Cradle call Satomi-sama, Blue Knight… A code name? No, this is…

Without waiting for Ruth's reply, Koutarou smiled and continued speaking.

“I… will protect everyone's future with my life, and these two swords.”

And it wasn't just Ruth and Theia. Koutarou wanted to protect everyone who suffered in his presence. He couldn't protect everyone in the world, for he was no god, but he at least wanted to make those who had made him smile, smile in return.

That was Koutarou's oath, and his wish.

Koutarou had returned from the past Forthorthe to fulfill that oath.

“So let's go, Ruth-san. Theia is waiting.”

“U…Uhm…”

Koutarou pulled Signaltin from its sheath as Ruth struggled to come up with something to say.

Its silvery white blade seemingly responded to Koutarou's feelings as it shot out its white light.

Part 7

The title of special forces wasn't just for show. By the time the white light appeared, the five men noticed that danger was approaching them. It was probably their intuition as pros telling them that an irregular situation had occurred.

So the men in black carrying beam cannons, barriers and more of the likes, vigilantly waited for the enemy to show himself.

“It's just one neanderthal and the Pardomshiha daughter…?”

“The neanderthal has a knight sword, and the girl has a small arms for self-defense.”

“Are they insane…?”

However, in contrary to their intuition, the oncoming enemy was just far too weak. Upon confirming their enemies’ appearances, they believed their intuition had been wrong. They didn't believe that their enemies, Koutarou and Ruth, stood a chance at beating them.

To them it seemed like their enemies had gone mad. Not only were the enemies in less numbers than them, but they were challenging the special forces with just an old knight's sword and a small arms for self-defense. The special forces assumed that their enemies were driven into a suicide attack because of their excessive loyalty.

That's why they chose not to use the powerful weaponry they had stored on their spaceship. They believed they would win with the equipment they had on them. This wasn't them letting their guard down; it was a very natural judgment in the world they lived in.

“What do we do, Captain?”

“Kill the neanderthal. And capture the girl as planned.”

“I thought so…”

“But what happened to Elexis-sama? He should have moved to intercept the girl… did they miss each other?”

Out of the five men, three of them stepped forward carrying large guns. They had determined that these three would be enough to deal with Koutarou and Ruth. The remaining two got to work on other jobs. The captain would confirm Elexis's safety, and the other one was placing Theia inside the spaceship.

Seeing what the five were up to, Koutarou let out a sigh of relief.

Phew, they all stayed here… Now we at least have a chance to win…

What Koutarou feared the most was that the special forces would leave behind some people to fight Koutarou and Ruth while the rest took Theia away. Fortunately for him that hadn't happened. With just two opponents and Elexis missing, they had decided to remain.

“Still… the quality of Forthorthe's soldiers sure have dropped… Flair-dono would cry…”

Koutarou was thankful for the situation, but his old friend would surely grieve at this. Koutarou found this humorous and he turned to face the men.

“S-Satomi-sama, you can't attack them from the front!”

“It's okay, leave this to me. Ruth-san, I want you to save Theia when you find an opening.”

“Satomi-sama!?”

Koutarou left the worried Ruth behind and casually stepped forward. Seeing that, the men began laughing.

Koutarou's Truth

“What? It looks like he seriously wants to fight us.”

“Let him do as he pleases.”

“That's true. If we shoot him dead before he could swing his sword he'll never get to rest in peace.”

Despite Koutarou approaching the men with a sword in hand, they remained confident. They were convinced that an old sword would never be able to break through their barriers. So they were planning on letting Koutarou to attack as he pleased.

“Hey, neanderthal kid. Just go ahead and attack. Show us those sword skills you've practiced.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course. Give it your all.”

“Are you fine with my all?”

“Yeah.”

“Alright, then I'll take you up on your word.”

Koutarou glared at the three men in front of him while simultaneously focusing and heightening his spiritual energy. At the same time, he sent his intentions to the sword and released its magic power.

Sorry, but I'll defeat you before you get the chance to fire those guns!

Having finished his preparations, Koutarou dashed forward.

“Wait! Kill him right now! He's—”

The captain shouted at the same time Koutarou rushed forward. The captain’s face was pale. He had just received a report about Koutarou from Elexis who had just woken up.

“Captain?”

But in the end, the three men never got the chance to fire their guns.

With a single swing, the barrier generators on their waists exploded. The barrier had generated tiles to block the sword, but the damage taken easily exceeded the generators tolerance, causing the generator to fry.

“What!?”

“Uwaaah!”

“C-Captain!?”

Surprised, the three were knocked off balance and they were now full of openings. Seeing that, Koutarou swung Signaltin without hesitation. Without their barriers, the men took the attack and were sent flying.

“…Relax, I used the back of the sword. You'd never be able to rest in peace if you died before being able to shoot.”

The three had been blown away by the shockwave magic covering the sword. They fell to the ground and were unable to move, but their lives weren't in any danger. The shockwave had been adjusted so that it wouldn't kill them.

“Who is this guy!?”

“Captain!?”

“Don't just stare! Fire!”

“Y-Yes sir!”

Having lost three allies in an instant, the remaining two hurriedly aimed towards Koutarou. It wasn't until their allies had been knocked out that they realized that the boy in front of them wasn't a normal boy.

The men fired, but what came out of their guns weren't normal bullets, but torrents of yellow light. They were heavy metal particles given a high amount of energy. Their weapons were mass produced beam rifles.

The power and speed of these rifles were greatly inferior to that which Clan used, but they were possible to mass produce, and they were cheap. When given to a squad, these would be more efficient overall. On top of that, they were easier to maintain than older models, and had been designed to function in all environments. This was yet another weapon that DKI wanted to sell to the military.

“It's probably a good weapon… but in the end they're mass-produced…”

Koutarou swung his sword horizontally and hit the oncoming beams.

As he did, the two beams were snuffed out like a fire on a candle. Koutarou had experience facing Clan's high performance rifle, so he wouldn't lose to lower quality, mass produced weapons.

“He cut them! He seriously cut the beams!”

“A-A monster, this guy's not human!”

“How rude, you two, seriously…”

Beams didn't work, and their barriers wouldn't protect them.

Koutarou completely destroyed their common sense, leaving the two men in a state of panic. It was like they were witnessing a paranormal phenomenon.

“I'm not the amazing one. The amazing ones are the ones lending me these powers.”

Koutarou, though amazed, readied his sword. After he had swung it once more, the frightened men had lost consciousness.

Part 8

After confirming that all the men were unconscious, Koutarou dropped his shoulders.

“Phew…”

No matter how often it happened, Koutarou couldn't get used to having killing intent directed at him, even if it was from someone he could beat.

“How could this be… with just that sword, he finished it in an instant…”

While Koutarou was feeling relief, Ruth's heart was pounding faster and faster. She couldn't believe what had happened in front of her eyes. It was as if she had witnessed a fairy tale.

Satomi-sama was strong before… but this is far above that… and he's not even wearing his armor…

All Koutarou had was a single sword; a sword that hadn't been created using modern science. It really was just a sword. Despite that, Koutarou had swiftly dispatched of five heavily armed men.

“Signaltin… Blue Knight… Could it really be…”

Ruth's glance was drawn to the sword in Koutarou's hand.

It was a knight's sword shining silvery white. Its power was certainly not inferior to modern science. That graceful sword, shaped like a traditional Forthorthe knight sword, shone as though it was a real magical sword.

Magic… that's right, Yurika-sama's cane!

That was when Ruth remembered something. It was regarding the real magical cane that Yurika had gotten. After Koutarou had returned, he gave that cane to Yurika as a souvenir. That cane really was magical, and Ruth had confirmed its effect personally several times. So there was a high chance that Koutarou's sword also was a magical sword.

If that sword really is a magical sword, and if it really is Signaltin… then that would mean…

Ruth thought of a certain hypothesis. It was far out there, and was comparable to dreams and fantasies. Compared to this, the hypothesis about Koutarou and Clan travelling to the past was nothing.

However, Ruth began feeling like that was the truth. Various circumstantial evidence was backing her up. And Ruth herself also wanted it to be true. When she thought about that, Ruth's heart began throbbing.

“Ruth-san, Theia…”

“R-Right.”

However, she could ask him for the truth later. Koutarou wouldn't run. Right now she had to save Theia. Ruth pulled herself together and chased after Koutarou to the hatch of the spaceship.

“There she is!”

“Your highness!”

Theia had been put down right next to the entrance. Since the hatch had been left open, the wind blowing in was gently moving her skirt. Since the man carrying her had hurried to join the fight, he had left her here.

“Thank goodness, her highness is alright.”

Ruth let out a sigh of relief and wiped away her tears. She had been so worried that when she saw that Theia was safe, she almost collapsed onto the floor out of sheer relief.

Theia was still unconscious, but her complexion was fine and she didn't seem to be injured. Elexis's subordinates had at least been somewhat courteous to the princess. Based on this, it was only a question of time before Theia woke up.

“Ruth-san, let's carry Theia out of here.”

“Let's do that.”

Though their enemies were defeated, they weren't dead. It was necessary to move to a different place quickly. Koutarou picked up Theia and decided to return to room 106 for now. In that room there were a lot of people that would help protect Theia and Ruth.

Koutarou returned Signaltin to its sheath and shouldered Theia's small body.

Ruth was helping him out, but she was somewhat spaced out as she stared at the crest on the sword.

No matter how I look at it, this really is…

After confirming that Theia was safe, the sword was the last remaining problem to Ruth.

“…Hm?”

That might not have been the reason why, but Koutarou was the first to notice a new enemy approaching.

“Not good… someone's coming.”

After exiting through the hatch and walking down the road in the park for a moment, Koutarou sensed an approaching enemy.

“Satomi-sama?”

“Is he still planning on fighting…”

Elexis was the one approaching them. There was still some distance between them, but Koutarou could sense his aura. It seemed like he had woken up and was headed this way.

“Alert message. High-density energy reaction detected. A small, hostile, mobile weapon is approaching. Please retreat immediately. Based on the enemy's total energy when compared to current equipment, chance of victory is estimated to be 4%.”

And what Koutarou felt was backed up by an alert message from his bracelet.

“A mobile weapon!?”

“Ruth-san, please take care of Theia.”

Koutarou put Theia down and leaned her against a nearby tree.

“What about you, Satomi-sama!?”

“I'll go defeat that mobile weapon or whatever.”

Considering the speed at which Elexis's aura was moving, they wouldn't be able to run away. And as long as the mobile weapon's sensors weren't broken, they wouldn't be able to hide. Koutarou determined that he had to defeat the mobile weapon.

“You can't, Satomi-sama! No matter how strong you might be, that is too dangerous! You at least need to wear your armor!”

Koutarou's Truth

When she heard Koutarou's decision, Ruth began to panic. Though it was small, a mobile weapon would have weaponry, like explosives, that could attack a wide area. With that, it wouldn't matter how quick Koutarou was, he would still take damage. Ruth couldn't imagine that Koutarou could win, and believed that the only chance to win was to retreat.

“Not a problem, I should be fine.”

“What's your basis for that!?”

Ruth's voice was close to a scream. She couldn't easily believe that Koutarou would be fine.

“Basis… that's true. Cradle, please collate the combat data.”

“Please set a condition.”

“What would be easier, facing Alunaya, or facing this enemy without armor?”

“Under that condition, chances of victory is estimated to be 280% higher than against Alunaya.”

“See?”

The bracelet, or more accurately the Cradle, gave a prediction Koutarou was expecting. His chances of victory against the mobile weapon was almost three times as high as against Alunaya.

“Don't give me that! Why is your chance of winning higher than against Yurika-sama in a costume!?”

“It's okay.”

Koutarou smiled and drew his sword.

“I have fought against the real one.”

“Eh? The real one?”

The moment after Koutarou readied his sword, Elexis appeared. The mobile weapon destroyed the surrounding trees and entered the open area around the spaceship. The mobile weapon stood at about five meters tall. It was small for Forthorthe standards, but it was large enough against humans. Despite being covered in the darkness of night, it stood out from its surroundings.

Elexis's amplified voice came from the speakers of the mobile weapon.

“I won't let you escape, neanderthal. Leave the ladies behind.”

Elexis was sitting in the cockpit in the upper part of the mobile weapon. His face could be seen through the transparent windshield.

“Hey, Dextro… you really love that thing, don't you…”

Despite facing the mobile weapon, Koutarou wasn't surprised. He even smiled as he looked up at Elexis.

“…Your personality seems to have improved a little, but you're still the same…”

“What are you smiling for?”

“Oh, no reason. I was just thinking that your toy looks strong.”

This mobile weapon had a characteristic appearance. It had a stocky figure of a person. The most accurate description would be that it looked like a muscular knight wearing heavy armor.

To think I'd face this thing again…

Koutarou's Truth

Koutarou had experience of fighting against a magical, steel giant. The mobile weapon that Elexis was controlling was very similar to that. Seeing its appearance, Koutarou felt nostalgic.

“It's strong. In the future, this will become a staple merchandise for our corporation. Once we release it, please buy one.”

“Yeah, I think I'll do just that.”

Koutarou pointed the tip of his sword towards the giant. Koutarou was less than two meters tall, facing a giant over five meters tall. The giant was almost three times as tall. Normally, Koutarou wouldn't stand a chance, but this time Elexis wouldn't let his guard down. Sitting in the cockpit, he sent a sharp glance towards Koutarou.

Koutarou's Truth

Koutarou's Truth

“I never could have imagined having to use this against a human. But since you surpass reason, I've decided to use the pride of our corporation.”

“You were the CEO, right?”

“Yeah. But rest easy, Neanderthal-kun. If you can defeat this, I won't be laying a hand on you for a while.”

“You won't make any business you'd lose out on… is it?”

“Precisely!”

Koutarou and Elexis smiled at each other.

That was when the booster on the giant's body suddenly activated, and the giant came flying towards Koutarou. With its size, the giant wasn't suited for walking. Instead, it would fly in the sky by manipulating gravity. And when rapid acceleration was necessary, it would use boosters. It worked the same way Koutarou's armor did.

“I'm happy to hear that! You really haven't changed at all!”

Koutarou rushed with his sword in hand. His speed wasn't comparable to the giant, but it was exceptionally fast for a human. This was all thanks to the spiritual energy and magic power he was using.

“How about this!?”

While moving rapidly, the giant fired the large gun on its left arm.

The giant fired a canister shot that spread into small bullets covering about a meter in area, and assaulted Koutarou.

“Oh!”

Koutarou rolled forward and passed under the bullets. At that time, a few bullets grazed Koutarou, but the sword’s magic protected him and reflected them.

It looks like he can dodge canister shots. However—!

Koutarou swiftly got up and rushed towards the giant again. He wasn't as good at controlling the sword’s magic power as Alaia was, so relying on the sword to protect him was dangerous. In order to not get shot, he had to get in closer.

“Exceptionally dodged! Very impressive!”

After firing a couple of canister shots at Koutarou, Elexis determined that he wouldn't be able to hit him and swiftly changed his method of attack. His next weapon was an axe for melee combat. To Koutarou, it looked like a huge axe, but to the giant it was but a small weapon. As a result, the giant would be able to swing it around swiftly. And the area it could strike was wide. Combined with the length of its arms, it could reach up to three meters. Elexis assumed that he would be able to hit Koutarou with this.

“It is an honor to be praised!”

Koutarou accepted his challenge. Since he wanted to attack with his sword, this was his big chance.

The giant set the boosters thrust to max and charged while Koutarou braced himself. The distance between the two shortened in a moment. The giant's attack reached Koutarou first.

“Take thiiiis!”

Koutarou's Truth

The giant swung its long right arm horizontally and the axe quickly approached Koutarou. With its heavy weight and speed, Koutarou would be dead even if something other than the axe hit him. It was an incredibly dangerous attack to Koutarou who wasn't wearing any protection.

“I won't get hit by something like this!”

Koutarou quickly jumped to escape and the axe passed under his feet. And using his momentum from jumping, Koutarou moved to attack the giant.

“I thought you'd do that, Neanderthal-kun!”

However, that's what Elexis had wanted. The giant pointed the gun on its left arm at Koutarou in the air. In the air there was no way he could dodge the canister shot. This was all according to Elexis' plan.

“Oh crap! Signaltin, I'm counting on you!”

The giant fired. And at the same time, Signaltin began glowing. Koutarou unleashed Signaltin's magic power. He created a barrier and kicked it. Through that, Koutarou was able to change the direction he was moving and just barely dodged the canister shot. The next moment, the canister shot crushed the barrier Signaltin had created.

“Really, you just do the unimaginable. You just jumped mid-air, didn't you?”

“Yeah. Despite my looks, I can move my body around quite well.”

In contrast to its looks, the giant quickly changed its direction. By the time Koutarou landed and readied his sword, the giant already had its weapon pointed at him.

“However it's about time I use a more powerful attack. Besides, I've completed my goal.”

“Your goal?”

“Satomi-sama! The soldiers!”

It wasn't until Koutarou heard Ruth's voice that he finalize caught on to Elexis's real goal.

I see, so he did it to let his subordinates escape! I got tricked by Dextro's face!

Two additional soldiers that had been hiding somewhere had carried the other five into the spaceship. Elexis had attacked to buy time for his subordinates.

“So you're buying time again… you're surprisingly caring for your subordinates.”

“I don't know about that. The most important thing for us is to not leave any evidence that we were involved behind. It's not to kill you or capture the ladies.”

While Elexis was distracting Koutarou, his subordinates were making preparations to retreat. But that would be meaningless if they left any evidence behind.

Well played… With this, even if I defeat him, we'll only escape the danger for a moment…

The systems on the Blue Knight, including the bracelets, were being scrambled, leaving behind no recordings that could be used as proof. The devices on the ship would self-destruct, and the soldiers that could serve as witnesses had been carried onboard the spaceship.

The only proof that would remain were the recordings on Koutarou's bracelet, but unskillfully announcing that would only put Clan in a difficult position. Clan was personally cooperating with Koutarou, but her Schweiger family were hostile with Theia's Mastir family. So Clan couldn't make any decisions that would have a negative impact on her family, and Koutarou didn't want to force that on her.

“My only miscalculation was not taking into the account the existence of an irregular like you.”

Koutarou's Truth

The weapons on the giant's shoulders were pointed towards Koutarou. On its right shoulder was a large beam cannon and on its left shoulder was a multi-purpose missile launcher that could fire up to eight shots at once. They were the most destructive weapons on this giant.

“If possible, I'd like to get rid of that irregular right here.”

“Aren't I an irregular because you can't get rid of me?”

“That certainly might be the reason!”

While Elexis was still speaking he fired the missiles. These missiles were guided using the target's heat signature and by camera. Having been fixed on their target, the missiles chased after Koutarou as if they were alive.

“Damnit!”

Koutarou was planning on getting as close to the missiles as possible before dodging, but they exploded a few meters before they reached him.

This method of attack was known as a proximity fuze. The missile exploded as it was still approaching the target and was intended to deal damage over a wider area. Not even Koutarou could dodge that attack.

“Satomi-sama!”

Ruth let out a scream. Koutarou had been caught in the missiles explosion. It was a wide area attack that Ruth had been fearing. Not even Koutarou would be in one piece after that. Ruth was protecting Theia from the blast while feeling something similar to despair.

“Satomi-sama! Satomi-sama!”

A cloud of dust shrouded the area where Koutarou had been. Since the explosion had been so close to the ground, a large part of it had been scooped out and thrown into the air, blocking all sight. However, the cold winter wind slowly blew it away.

And once the cloud of dust had been blown away, Ruth could see Koutarou lying wounded at the bottom of the hole that had been carved into the ground.

“Noooooooooooo! Satomi-sama!”

Upon spotting Koutarou, Ruth let out another scream. To her, something that should never happened just did.

“As expected, not even you could do anything about that…”

Next the beam cannon started moving. The turrets motor roar as it pointed the cannon towards Koutarou. Elexis was planning on finishing him off with this.

“Farewell, Neanderthal-kun. You put up a good fight.”

“Stop it, don't kill Satomi-samaaaa!”

Koutarou would die. The Koutarou who was supporting Theia and Ruth's dream. His death would almost be the same as the world ending to Ruth. Her screams were from the pain of her soul being torn apart.

However, Ruth's screams didn't reach Elexis, and he calmly pulled the trigger. The enormous amount of power generated by the giant was turned into a powerful beam and a giant spear of light attacked Koutarou.

The hole created by the missiles was widened even more by the beam. The soil was once again kicked up and created another cloud of dust, covering Koutarou.

“Satomi-sama! Please answer me, Satomi-samaaaa!”

Koutarou's Truth

Ruth was screaming and crying like a child. She was so frustrated that she couldn't leave Theia's side. She wanted to run up towards Koutarou and save him even now, but she couldn't leave Theia behind. All she could do was scream and cry.

“Well then, that gets rid off the irregular. All that's left is—”

“…Keep talking. I'm an irregular because you can't get rid of me.”

At that moment, the giant's right arm and leg were cut off.

“W-What!?”

Having lost its support, the giant fell to its right, with a surprised Elexis still in it.

And as it fell, the left arm and leg were cut off as well.

As it collapsed on the ground, the giant was without limbs and defenseless.

“Hah… it's finally over.”

The one that had cut off the giant's limbs was Koutarou, who was for some reason right next to it. Koutarou swung his sword and sent the oil on it flying, then pointed the sword towards the cockpit.

“Surrender. You've lost.”

“Satomi-sama! Y-You're alright!”

Ruth screamed out one last time. However, unlike before, this was a scream of joy.

“How!? Why are you standing there!? I just killed you!”

Elexis's face was distorted by his surprise. Koutarou who he had just killed was standing in front of him. It was like he was having a nightmare.

“The me you shot just now was what you would call a hologram.”

“I see! You hid when the missiles exploded and left a substitute behind!”

“Yeah. As a result, my clothes are a wreck. How are you going to make up for this?”

Koutarou had been caught in the missiles blast, but he hadn't taken enough damage to be incapacitated. The only damage was his scorched clothes and a few burns and bruises on his body. Signaltin, and the defensive spell Yurika had cast on him beforehand had barely been enough to save him. This was thanks to the missiles’ proximity fuze. If they had exploded on contact, he would have taken far more damage.

Koutarou then used the kicked up dirt and hid himself. He also created an illusion of himself using Signaltin. Since Koutarou wasn't as good as Alaia at controlling Signaltin, the illusion he made was a simple one that couldn't move. However, that was more than enough to emulate an injured Koutarou.

And while Elexis was distracted by the illusion, Koutarou snuck up on the giant and cut off its limbs. In other words, the wide area attack that Elexis was sure would bring him victory had instead been the reason for his defeat.

As expected from magical girl Yurika. To think a real magical girl would be this reliable…

Yurika had become a real magical girl very recently, and to Koutarou, Yurika was now more reliable than ever. She was so reliable to the point that Koutarou was planning on offering her dinner for several days.

“…So losing sight of Quick-kun was the end of my luck, huh. For the time being, I'll give you one my suits at a later time.”

“That's a big help.”

“That said, can I hear your name? I want to know the name of the man who bested me.”

Elexis accepted his defeat and smiled wryly while dropping his shoulders.

“It's Koutarou.”

“Koutarou, huh. It's an odd name, but I'll remember it.”

“Now then, give up without a fight. You've lost.”

The tip of Koutarou's sword touched the cockpit’s windshield. However, Elexis shook his head and smiled.

“It's true that I have lost, but I can't surrender. I'm a CEO with a lot of employees.”

Suddenly the giant began spewing out a large amount of smoke. The white smoke quickly filled the area and Koutarou's vision was blocked.

“What!? A smoke screen!?”

And in the moment that Koutarou was distracted by the smoke screen, a loud explosive sound could be heard.

“Let's meet again, Koutarou-kun!”

That explosion was the sound of the giant's ejection seat activating.

The seat and Elexis was launched high up into the sky. And he was picked up by the spaceship that had left before anyone knew it.

In this situation Koutarou couldn't chase after them, and by the time the smokescreen cleared, Elexis and the others were far out of his reach.

“…Well, I guess you're still as shrewd as you were 2,000 years ago, Dextro.”

Koutarou sighed as he followed the spaceship with his eyes.

After activating the ejection seat, the giant was enveloped in an intense flame. It burned up its body and left behind no evidence.

And with that, there was no evidence left behind. And the fact that Theia and Ruth were attacked by the military and DKI was completely covered up. They had appeared without warning and left without leaving any evidence. They were a hard opponent to fight against.

“…What a troublesome enemy…”

Koutarou ground his teeth while the fires from the giant lit up the area. Elexis's retreat was so well done that he instinctively found himself doing that.

Ruth, Theia and Master

Part 1

Thursday, February 11

After the fight had ended, Koutarou picked up Theia. They were going to leave the area before people who had heard the explosion gathered.

“Alright. Let's go, Ruth-san.”

Carrying Theia, Koutarou turned towards Ruth.

“Hm? What's wrong?”

When he did, he saw Ruth kneeling.

“Although I was unaware, please forgive me for all my impoliteness.”

Ruth bowed deeply towards Koutarou. That was what someone of lower status did towards one of higher status.

“What are you doing?”

Koutarou was puzzled by Ruth's sudden actions. She slowly raised her head and looked up at Koutarou.

Ruth-san?

Koutarou wasn't sure of what kind of expression Ruth was making.

It looked like she was crying, but it also looked like she was smiling. Her eyes were moistened by tears and her cheeks were red. And her calm eyes gazed at Koutarou, trying to tell him something.

All that Koutarou could tell was that while Ruth was crying, she wasn't sad.

“That sword… it's the real Signaltin, isn't it?”

Ruth's words didn't answer the question on Koutarou's mind. She narrowed her eyes and looked at the beautiful sword glowing of silvery white hanging on Koutarou's waist. Ruth had seen the power of that sword first hand, and she had concluded that the sword was the real Signaltin.

“Ruth-san…”

Koutarou let out a small sigh and looked down on the sword on his waist.

So it really did come to this…

Koutarou felt it was regrettable that he couldn't protect the secret, but he had been prepared that Ruth might reach that answer, so he didn't panic.

“I am from a family that has served Forthorthe for a long time. Even I can discern that this is not a replica.”

As Ruth said that, she reached out with her hand and touched Koutarou's sword. And she gently stroked it as if it was her own child.

“I thought something was strange. Why had all the armor's data been erased… If you had just been thrown out of the universe, there would have been no need to do that.”

Ruth shed tears as she continued speaking. They kept flowing and wet her cheeks.

“But, this makes sense. Satomi-sama and Clan-sama travelled to the past Forthorthe, and had came back with this sword.”

Ruth, Theia and Master

Ruth was desperately trying to suppress her own feelings. If she let her guard down even a little, her emotions would explode and she would throw herself at Koutarou. However, that wouldn't convey anything. Ruth wanted Koutarou to know what she was feeling right now. Just how thankful she was for this miracle.

“And you erased the data to keep that truth a secret. The reason was to not cause Forthorthe any needless confusion.”

Ruth looked back up at Koutarou. Her glance was filled with trust and love.

“All of that leads to a single answer.”

Ruth was in bliss, to the point where she couldn't express it with words. The future that she could never obtain was now right in front of her. Ruth felt like she would go crazy as she felt that intense, deep joy.

“And that is that you are the highest ranking knight of Forthorthe, the Blue Knight, his Excellency Reios Fatra Bertorion.”

All of the clues pointed in that direction.

The silvery white sword, the damaged armor, his relationship with Clan, his improved skill with the sword. The fragmented clues eventually led Ruth to a single solution.

And that was that Koutarou was Forthorthe's legendary hero, the Blue Knight.

“…The highest ranking?”

Those words puzzled Koutarou. Seeing Koutarou's expression change upon hearing those words, Ruth was convinced and showed a smile of true joy.

“So it… really is the truth…?”

“…Yes.”

Koutarou nodded firmly in response to Ruth's question.

“Ah… goddess of the dawn… I thank you for this miracle…”

Ruth loved Koutarou. Those feelings had surpassed her admiration for the Blue Knight for quite a while.

However, now that she knew that Koutarou and the Blue Knight were the one and the same, her admiration for the Blue Knight was added onto her feelings for Koutarou. And her feelings for him were now greater than ever.

“…Your title of Blue Knight, was affixed as the highest rank after the war by her majesty Alaia, in praise of, your loyalty.”

The tears flowing from Ruth's eyes weren't stopping and her sobbing made it hard for her to speak.

Your highness… our Blue Knight… was the real one…

Her trembling hand grasped at her throbbing chest and while her tears wet her cheeks, Ruth did her best to continue speaking. She wanted Koutarou to know just who he was.

“Ever since, 'Blue Knight' has become your personal title. There is no knight that has inherited that title since. 'Blue Knight' is the leader of the knights. It is a higher rank than my title of Guardian Knight.”

“The leader of the knights…?”

Ruth, Theia and Master

Just a moment ago Ruth had been the one confused, but now the tables had turned and Koutarou was gradually understanding the complicated position he was in.

“Yes. As long as you possess that sword and go by the title of Blue Knight, you have the most authority in Forthorthe after royalty. And not even the highest standing nobles, no, not even royalty, would have an easy time doing something to you. You're an exception amongst exception.”

There were too many exceptions Alaia had set up for the Blue Knight to count.

Not only was the Bertorion's special territory still forbidden to enter, the Blue Knight's salary was still included in the national budget even now after 2,000 years had passed.

When it came to the law, exceptions for the Blue Knight were given priority and not even the emperor could remove that right. That is what Alaia had prepared for Koutarou if he were to return to Forthorthe 2,000 years in the future for some reason.

“I see… so her majesty, Alaia did…”

“Yes. If you so feel like it, Master, you could even order me to die.”

As Ruth said that she put her hand on her chest and smiled as if she was saying she'd be willing to die on the spot.

“I won't order something like that.”

“I am aware, Master. Fufu, fufufufu.”

Ruth was well aware that Koutarou would never give such an order. But at the same time, she almost wanted him do to just that.

“By the way… what's with that master thing?”

“Master is Master. You are the most important knight, so it's only obvious I call you that.”

“I'm not all that important though.”

“Oh, but you are. What are you saying, geez…”

To Ruth this was unbearably amusing. The Blue Knight was the most famous general in Forthorthe's history. But the person in question was saying that he wasn't all that important.

“Fufu, I can't wait for her highness to wake up.”

Ruth looked at Theia, resting on Koutarou's back, and smiled through her tears.

“Once her highness learns of Satomi-sama's identity… fufufu.”

Ruth was almost dying with anticipation to see what kind of expression Theia would make when she told her about Koutarou.

“About that… Please don't tell Theia about my secret.”

“Master!? Why is that!?”

Koutarou's words came as a surprise to Ruth. To Theia this would be incredibly happy news.

“Theia's dream will be ruined.”

“That's not true! Not at all!”

“And if both the Blue Knight and Signaltin were to appear, Forthorthe would enter a state of confusion. The fewer that know about this, the better.”

“Her highness would definitely keep it a secret!”

“It's not about if she'll keep it a secret… just knowing it will influence her judgment.”

Ruth, Theia and Master

Koutarou trusted Theia and Ruth. They would without a doubt keep it a secret. However, Koutarou believed that the fact that he was the Blue Knight and that Signaltin existed would fetter Theia's decisions. So aside from having his secret revealed from unavoidable circumstances, he had no intention of revealing it on his own. Neither Koutarou nor Alaia wished for that.

“Her highness's judgment…”

Ruth understood the meaning of that as well. A big secret like that which can't be told to anyone would only be an unnecessary risk.

“I, understand…”

Ruth reluctantly decided to listen to Koutarou. Considering today's events, it would be for the best to keep the risk as low as possible. Although logic dictated that she do so, Ruth was very disappointed.

Part 2

By the time Theia woke up, her surroundings had changed into something more familiar. She was in her private room onboard the Blue Knight. And besides here was her childhood friend. It was the same scene she always witnessed when waking up.

“Ruth.”

“Good morning, your highness.”

“…What happened?”

The last thing Theia could remember was being attacked by Elexis's subordinates and resisting them. Theia asked Ruth what happened after that.

“Before your highness could be abducted, Satomi-sama repelled the enemy.”

“What about Elexis?”

“He escaped. And he didn't leave any evidence behind.”

“I see… we fell completely into his trap…”

From a brief talk, Theia had learned everything she wanted to know. This was probably thanks to the two having spent a long time together. And the discussion regarding the attack ended there.

“What about Koutarou?”

“He is safe. I believe he is eating dinner right now.”

Ruth had prepared dinner while Theia was sleeping. Koutarou's injuries hadn't been anything serious, so he should be eating dinner with everyone else around now.

“I see… that's good…”

Upon hearing that Koutarou was safe, Theia's expression brightened up.

You really did come to save me, Koutarou… and I'm glad you're okay…

Theia had complicated feelings regarding Koutarou, but that wasn't his fault. So she was happy that he had come to save her and she felt relief to hear that he was safe. In the end, Theia loved Koutarou.

“How about you confirm it with your own eyes?”

“No, that's fine…”

Theia shook her head at Ruth's suggestion. If she stayed by Koutarou's side any longer, she would most likely make a decision that would make Koutarou suffer. Theia wanted to avoid that. Since she loved Koutarou, she wanted him to be as happy as possible.

“Your highness…”

Ruth understood Theia's feelings very well. Just a while ago she had been thinking the same thing. But in the end, she chose Koutarou. Because she realized that she would hate it any other way. And now that she had learned of Koutarou's secret, she was convinced that her decision was correct. Ruth wanted to convey to that Theia somehow, she wanted her to understand that it was okay to love Koutarou.

I should tell her… I feel sorry for her highness…

Upon thinking about it hard, Ruth decided to tell Theia. So Ruth sat down on the chair next to the bed and faced Theia.

Ruth, Theia and Master

“Your highness, there is one thing I want to tell you.”

“What now, why so formal?”

Noticing that Ruth was acting different from normal, Theia straightened herself up and turned towards Ruth. As a result, they ended up looking directly at each other.

“I am well aware of how you are feeling, your highness. And I will say this knowing that.”

Ruth looked straight into Theia's eyes and slowly spoke. Her words were overflowing with her desire to let her childhood friend be happy.

“Your highness, don't hesitate, just choose Satomi-sama. Living with him is not a sin in any way. He will surely be of help to the people of Forthorthe.”

“Ruth…”

Ruth's feelings were conveyed to Theia as well. Theia knew painfully well how Ruth must have felt saying that.

“How can you say that? I can't… find any reason behind it…”

But even then, Theia couldn't make her decision.

It was already a matter of fact that Koutarou was special to Theia and Ruth. However, could the citizens find enough value in Koutarou to accept the Mastir family's lineage dying out? That's what Theia was thinking of.

“I believe in Satomi-sama. He will surely leave behind greater achievements than even the legendary Blue Knight.”

Ruth knew that Koutarou would contribute to Forthorthe, even more than the Blue Knight. In reality, he already had. Since Koutarou was the Blue Knight himself, he had already contributed more to Forthorthe than the legends told. Koutarou was more than qualified to serve as Theia's partner. If anything, Theia might not be qualified enough for him.

However, Ruth felt like Theia's feelings towards Koutarou needed to be developed even further before she learned of the truth. If not, she would surely regret it. Based on Theia's personality, if she were to choose Koutarou by relying on him being the Blue Knight, she would regret making her decision that reliance later.

“Do you believe that Satomi-sama is inferior to the Blue Knight, your highness?”

“I don't, of course not!”

Theia intensely shook her head.

She believed that Koutarou was her greatest knight, that he surpassed even the Blue Knight. And she wanted everyone to believe that to be the truth.

“But… But you see I am an alien! Even if we were to marry a child would never be born! I can never give him a family!”

Theia suffered greatly, since she had grown up with a single parent like Koutarou, she was very well aware of how he felt towards family. And if he were to marry her he would never have a family. Theia believed that it was nothing but sinful to tie him down like that.

“I don't care if it's Kiriha or Yurika! If he doesn't marry a human from Earth he will never be happy! I won't do for him!”

Theia shouted out while crying and strongly grasping the bed sheets.

Why an alien… why couldn't you appear in front of me as a man of Forthorthe…

Theia had never begrudged being an alien as much as this. The fact that they could never become normal lovers was exceptionally painful for Theia. And that pain turned into large tears and rained down on her sheets.

“Then you only need to give him double the happiness. Happiness comes in more than one shape.”

Ruth spoke out in a gentle voice and gently removed Theia's fingers grasping on to the sheet, one by one. Once her hand was free, Ruth placed her own hand in Theia's.

“Ruth…”

Ruth's warmth and words sunk into Theia's chest.

A happiness greater than having a family… a different kind of happiness…

Theia and Ruth were not related, yet they shared a happiness. So the same should be possible between Theia and Koutarou. That was what Ruth was trying to say.

“And you believe I can do that?”

“It's not whether you can or cannot. You will do it. It is not like everyone can have a child either.”

Even in Forthorthe, infertile couples existed, who were unable to have children. There were all kinds of reasons, be it genes, injuries or the likes. But even then they chose each other, because they believed. So Theia should be able to do the same. Ruth not only believed in Koutarou, but in Theia as well.

“However… I am scared.”

Theia could understand what Ruth was saying, that was probably the truth, but there was one more thing that worried Theia.

“Just what could a princess of Forthorthe fear?”

“I am terrified of controlling the fate of one person! This is the first I have ever been this frightened!”

Theia's tears overflowed from her eyes and she strongly gripped Ruth's hand.

“Your highness…”

Theia's hand was shaking, Ruth squeezed on her hand to stop the trembles. But that wasn't enough to stop the shaking.

“I am terrified of seeing the sight of Koutarou regretting his decision!”

What Theia was scared of was what might happen after she took Koutarou back to Forthorthe with her. That although everything might be fine at the start, as time passed, he would come to regret coming to Forthorthe. He would probably never say he regretted it, but what about how he truly felt? That's what frightened Theia.

“I don't want him feeling lonely and looking up into the starry sky, searching for Earth! I alone will surely not be enough to save him from that solitude…”

The thought of Koutarou searching for Earth in the stars, something he would never find, floated into Theia's mind. She did so herself; if she looked up at the stars, she would inadvertently look for Forthorthe. Theia had come here of her own will, so that was fine. But what about Koutarou? And if that turned into a reality, what would she do? Theia herself couldn't think of anything to help.

“Then let us search for a way together, you and me, your highness.”

“Ruth!?”

That was where Ruth suggested the unthinkable, leaving Theia at a loss for words.

“If your highness alone can't save him from his solitude on your own, then the two of us might be able to.”

“The two of us…”

Theia had been surprised at first, but if she was together with Ruth, it might be possible. And both Koutarou and Ruth were in Theia's ideal future. She also knew of Ruth's feelings for Koutarou. With that in mind, she began believing that the two of them supporting Koutarou together might be the correct choice.

“…Ruth, tell me one thing.”

However, Theia had a single doubt regarding Ruth's words. Noticing that, she showed her normal, challenging smile while still holding onto Ruth's hand.

Your highness…

That alone was enough for Ruth to understand that Theia had made up her mind. That Theia would walk together with Koutarou, regardless of how difficult that path may be.

“You are just planning on using me for your own happiness, aren't you? I won't be mad so just be honest.”

“Of course.”

Ruth nodded firmly. Her gesture held more meaning than just the answer to Theia's question. And the two of them poured even more strength into their hands.

“My happiness is on the other side of her highness's happiness.”

“…That's one way to put it. You're being reckless…”

Theia sounded like she was amazed, however, that was just her words. The feelings conveyed in her words held a different meaning.

“That's because you can't contain that person without being reckless.”

“…Fufufu, that's right.”

Like such, Theia was finally able to make up her mind.

I will live together with Koutarou and Ruth…

She knew that there would be hardships in the future. Since they were aliens, her uneasiness was considerable. That's why she would surpass the hardships, even if they seemed impossible to obtain a future that would hold value to many people.

“Still… so that's how it is…”

Ruth smiled.

“What is it?”

Theia tilted her head and looked at Ruth.

“I was just remembering what your highness had said a little while ago.”

“What I said?”

“Yes.”

Both Theia and Ruth's expressions were exceptionally bright. The gloomy feelings they had been carrying for these past few days had been greatly diminished.

Ruth, Theia and Master

“Just a moment ago, you said 'I am terrified of controlling the fate of one person.’ I believe those are wonderful words from a royalty of Forthorthe.”

“That's true. It's thanks to my coming to Earth. The past me was so foolish.”

And their emotions that had become clearer strengthened their bond even more.

“You could just say that it's thanks to Satomi-sama.”

“…Even if I don't say it, you will. Right?”

“Fufufu, that's correct.”

After smiling at each other, Theia let go of Ruth's hand and jumped off the bed.

“Alright.”

“Your highness?”

Upon landing firmly on the carpet, Theia turned towards Ruth again and reached out her hand.

“There is something I have to do right away. Ruth, I need your help. Please lend me your strength.”

“…As you wish, my princess.”

Ruth grabbed onto Theia's hand without any hesitation.

Valentine's Day

Part 1

Friday, February 12

Kenji was hiding behind the water tank on the roof of the school, impatiently waiting for Koutarou to appear.

“…That letter did reach Koutarou, didn't it?”

“Yes Mister Mackenzie! We confirmed that Satomi read the letter!”

A few other boys apart from Kenji were hiding next to the wall of the water tank. They were all part of the unpopular boys alliance, but for some reason they were now working together with their supposed enemy.

Today was the final school day before Valentine's Day. Since this year’s Valentine's Day was on a Sunday, chocolates were given out today. Of course, Kenji had already been given a large amount of chocolate. Kenji had used some of the excess chocolate he had gotten to bribe a part of the unpopular boy’s alliance. And Kenji was using them to prank Koutarou. That's why Kenji and the boys were hiding on the roof.

The reason for this was because Koutarou had been preparing to prank Kenji beforehand. However, before it could be pulled off, he had been betrayed by some of the boys that Kenji had bribed. With the scheme revealed, Kenji avoided the prank and instead set up a revenge prank.

“Hurry up and come, Kou… what's waiting for is not a girl~”

Kenji soothed his beating heart while holding a sign in his hand.

It read 'You've been pranked!.’

Kenji was smiling as he imagined just what kind of expression Koutarou would make upon seeing that.

When Koutarou came up to the roof, there was no one in sight.

“Eh? Nobody's here?”

During lunchtime, Koutarou had gotten a letter but the sender was unknown. The words 'I will be waiting on the roof after school' were written on the very cute and feminine letter. Koutarou believed that he would find out who the sender by coming here, but sadly he couldn't find anyone. Troubled, Koutarou decided to wait on the roof for a while.

“Hmm… who's it from…”

While waiting for the letters sender to show up, Koutarou examined the characters written on it. He had no recollection of having seen them before.

Harumi and Shizuka wrote more neat characters, and Theia and Ruth couldn't write Japanese this well yet. Yurika's writing was worse than this and Kiriha's writing was on par with a calligraphy master. The closest one he could think of was Sanae, but her writing would have more fluff. She would normally add in hearts or stars.

And as Koutarou was tilting his head—

“Satomi-kun!”

Koutarou's name was called, when he turned to look in the direction of the voice, he spotted Harumi standing near the entrance to the roof, waving her hand.

“Sakuraba-senpai!”

Valentine's Day

Koutarou shoved the letter in his pocket and ran up to Harumi. It would be faster if he moved to her than wait here.

“So this is where you were, Satomi-kun.”

Harumi welcomed Koutarou with a smile, however, that smile was somewhat awkward. Seeing that, Koutarou realized that Harumi had some business with him.

“Is something the matter, Sakuraba-senpai?”

“W-Well, actually…”

Upon hearing the question, Harumi blushed slightly and began looking through her school bag.

“I was looking for you, so I could give you this…”

Harumi pulled out two flat boxes from her bag. The boxes were about ten centimeters in all directions and two centimeters tall. The boxes were just large enough to fit in each of her hands. Both of them were wrapped with red paper and had a white ribbon around them.

“Could this be chocolate?”

Even Koutarou could tell that the boxes were full of chocolate that Harumi had prepared.

“That's right! Since you're always helping me out I made some for you and Matsudaira-kun!”

Harumi spoke quickly and restlessly, and she presented the boxes to Koutarou. She had a stiff posture, as if she was receiving a diploma.

“Please give one to Matsudaira-kun.”

“Thank you very much, Sakuraba-senpai.”

Koutarou didn't think anything was out of the normal and accepted the boxes from Harumi.

“Obligation chocolate from Sakuraba-senpai huh… I'll be sure to brag about it to everyone.”

Since both of the boxes looked the same, Koutarou naturally assumed that they were both obligation chocolates. There was no way that they'd both be true love chocolate. However, Harumi's obligation chocolate was different from the rest. And Koutarou was very pleased at having gotten some chocolate.

“And… there are names written on the other side, so don't pick the wrong one, okay?”'

“Ah, yes. Okay. I'll make sure of it.”

Koutarou looked under the boxes and saw the names 'Satomi-kun' and Matsudaira-kun' written on the boxes.

“I've put in chocolate that I think each of you will like.”

“I see. Sorry for making you go out of your way.”

“I-It wasn't really all that much! I always prepare all kinds of chocolate for adult tastes and childish tastes for my father and the children at the hospital.”

“I see, so that's what you did.”

Koutarou quickly caught on to what Harumi meant. Harumi had made various chocolates for people that had helped her under the year and for the children she was close to. And she had made some extra for Koutarou and Kenji while she was working on that.

Phew… Thank goodness, Satomi-kun didn't realize…

Harumi felt relieved as she looked at Koutarou putting the boxes of chocolate in his bag. She had partly lied in her explanation. The box for Kenji contained the kind of chocolate that Harumi had mentioned, but Koutarou's box of chocolate was different. In it was the greatest of the dozen or so recipes of chocolate she had tried.

Harumi had processed the chocolate into a creamy form and stuffed it in a small plastic case. And in the box were marshmallows and crackers that could be dipped in the cream. That was the chocolate Harumi had made just for Koutarou that appealed to his taste and playful personality.

Because of the manufacturing process, it was not possible to mass-produce this chocolate that used only the highest quality of chocolate available. On the contrary to Koutarou's imagination, this box contained true love chocolate.

“Okay then, I'll take my leave now!”

Having successfully handed off her chocolate, Harumi quickly left. She had business to attend to, not to mention she would be embarrassed if Koutarou opened the chocolate and ate it in front of her.

“Huh? What about our club activities?”

“Didn't I tell you yesterday? I have to go to hospital this week, so it's cancelled.”

“Oh yeah… Ah, and you're going to give out chocolate while you're there, right?”

“Fufufu, that's right. So, see you later, Satomi-kun.”

“Yes, I'll see you on Monday.”

Harumi gently waved her hand and smiled and left the roof.

When Harumi entered the schoolhouse, the door closed quietly behind her. However, just a short while after that it slammed open again.

“Whoa!?”

“Ah, there you are, Satomi-kun!”

Koutarou had instinctively bent backwards when the door flew open, and in front of him was now his classmate, Maki.

“A-Aika-san?”

Upon entering the rooftop, Maki pointed at Koutarou's face.

“Fufu, Satomi-kun, I have something nice for you.”

Maki then put that finger into the pocket of her school uniform and pulled out a long and slender box wrapped in indigo paper.

“Here, a true love chocolate♪”

Maki shook the box two or three times in front of Koutarou's face before presenting it to him. Koutarou on the other hand was coldly staring at the box.

“…So how much are you planning on charging me?”

Koutarou knew that this chocolate had to be paid for. It was the treacherous true love chocolate that had led his companions in the unpopular boys alliance onto the road to degenerates.

“Nothing at all, geez!”

“You won't fool me! Tell me the truth! What are your goals!? Is it white day? I see, so you're planning on making me pay you back at three times the price!”

Koutarou had never gotten any true love chocolate in his life, but he had heard the rumors of having to repay the gift with three times the value. Koutarou suspected that this was Maki's goal.

“Why won't you just accept it!? It's because you're like this that you're not popular!”

“Leave me be! You wouldn't understand how I feel! All you do is play with men’s innocent hearts.”

“I just happened to get a cancellation on a chocolate, so I figured I would give it to you!”

“Give it here!”

“As if I would give it to you now!”

Maki started sulking over Koutarou's impolite attitude and puffed up her cheeks.

“…Well, speaking seriously, if you've worked hard on it, give it to whoever you get along with the best. It would be a shame for the chocolate to go to waste.”

“Satomi-kun…”

However upon hearing Koutarou's serious words, the air in Maki's cheeks escaped and she showed her normal expression. However, below that expression was a small smile and Maki presented the chocolate to Koutarou once more.

“Then I really will give it to you.”

“Are you sure?”

“You're my best friend after all. Well, just consider it an investment for next year.”

And Maki, still smiling, gave the chocolate to Koutarou.

“What does that mean?”

“It means, you should work hard to make me give you a real true love chocolate for next year.”

“I don't have much confidence. You seem like you'd be pretty high cost…”

“Geez, why can't you just say you'll do your best!?”

“W-Was I supposed to!?”

But in the end, Koutarou ended up angering Maki.

The door slammed shut just as it had swung open in the first place and Maki left the rooftop, steaming.

And at about the same time as the door closed, something crashed into it.

“Koutarou, come help!”

The very next moment Sanae passed through the door. In a fluster, she spoke quickly and explained what had happened while pointing towards the door.

“Yurika crashed into the door and isn't moving!”

“W-What!?”

Koutarou quickly opened the door, and there he saw Yurika collapsed on the floor. A large bump had formed on her head, showing that she had crashed into the door at a high speed.

“When we were trying to get out on the roof, that Maki showed up with this really angry face… Yurika quickly jumped away and hit the door just as it slammed shut…”

“I see… sorry about that, Yurika.”

It seemed like Yurika was caught up in Maki's frustration. Which meant that this was indirectly Koutarou's fault for angering Maki. Feeling responsible for the incident, Koutarou picked up Yurika and sat her down on a bench installed on the rooftop.

“S-Shatomi-shan… The whorld, the whorld is spinning…”

Even after being placed down on the bench, Yurika still hadn't recovered. The impact made her dizzy and she was pointlessly spinning her neck round and round.

“We'll leave Yurika be for a while. So, what did you two come here for?”

Sanae was looking down on Yurika alongside Koutarou, but when she heard what he said, she clapped her hands.

“That's right, that's right. Koutarou, hurry on home today, I've bought chocolate so let’s eat it together!”

“I see, so that's what you were after.”

“Yeah!”

Since Sanae was a ghost, she couldn't eat chocolate on her own, so she needed Koutarou's help.

“Yurika, you too?”

“C-Chocolate… I bought shome too…”

Yurika still seemed to be dizzy, but she searched through her pocket and pulled out the chocolate inside. Upon seeing the chocolate, Koutarou instinctively let out a few words.

“…It's so small.”

“Don't say that. Yurika was going to buy a bigger one at first, but then she found a new flavor of instant noodles. That's why this is all the chocolate she has.”

The new flavored noodles, Kanto seaweed soy sauce, cost 78 yen a pack, and Yurika had a total of 100 yen. She was going to buy the ramen and two 10 yen chocolates. However, fate worked against Yurika, with the consumption tax added, the total came to 103 yen, or 3 yen too short to buy two chocolates.

As a result, Yurika was only able to buy a single 10 yen chocolate.

“Valentine's Day, should just vhanish.”

“It must have been hard on you, Yurika… I know, I understand how you must feel…”

Upon receiving the chocolate from Yurika, Koutarou's eyes began to tear up.

Yurika only bought a single chocolate, and since it only costs 10 yen, she couldn't possibly give it to the boy she likes. So she gave it to me as an obligation chocolate. Poor girl…

That was how Koutarou interpreted the situation Yurika was in and he took her hand and nodded repeatedly.

“Yurika, I'll eat your chocolate with great care…”

“S-Shatomi-saaaaan… Uh, Uhh~”

Nijino Yurika, a first year high schooler.

And thus, her Valentine's Day cruelly ended.

“Okay, I'll see you later, Koutarou. Make sure you hurry home, okay?”

With the winter being so cold, she was planning on waiting for him in the warmth of their room.

“I know. Be careful on your way home.”

“Yeah! Come on, let's go, Yurika.”

“Uuuhhhh.”

Sanae dragged Yurika with her off the rooftop. She wasn't sure if Yurika was crying or if she was still dizzy.

“You don't have to cry that much. When we get home I'll give you half of my chocolate.”

“Really!?”

“…Actually make that a quarter.”

“Eeeehh!? Please make it half! You told me you would!”

As Koutarou watched Yurika chase after Sanae, he began worrying about her future.

“…Yurika, are you really okay with that? Are you okay with not fixing your life…?”

“If that's what you feel, then you can just look after her yourself. I believe you would be a good fit as Yurika's guardian.”

“Me!? … Wait, what are you doing, Kiriha-san?”

“Oh, just playing around.”

Valentine's Day

After seeing Sanae and Yurika off, Koutarou noticed Kiriha's arm around his. With their arms linked, they looked like lovers as Kiriha pressed her body towards Koutarou's arm and smiled happily.

“I made a true love chocolate, but sadly I couldn't find the person I wanted to give it too. So I'd like you to serve as a substitute.”

“I see, so that's why you're doing this.”

“That's correct.”

Kiriha embraced Koutarou's arm and drew her face closer to his shoulder. By doing that, her bountiful breasts pushed up against his arm, but strangely enough, Koutarou wasn't panicking as much as he had in the past. That was most likely due to their trusting relationship that they had developed back in October.

“Please take it, Koutarou.”

Kiriha presented Koutarou with a long and slender box. The box was based on brown and black, and had been wrapped with papers of calming colors. Not only did Kiriha's chocolate have an adult flavor, it had an adult packaging.

“That's not like you.”

However, Koutarou didn't accept the chocolate and instead pushed it back towards her.

“What do you mean?”

“Valentine's Day is the day after tomorrow. It's still too early to ask me to be your substitute.”

Today was February 12th, so Kiriha still had two days left to find the person she loved. So Koutarou couldn't accept the chocolate now.

“Fufufu, now that you mention it. Since Shizuka is making a cake for today, I convinced myself that it was Valentine's Day.”

“Is Landlord-san making a cake?”

“Yes, it's a chocolate cake. She wanted to eat it with everyone so she's making a pretty large one. I promised I'd help her make it later.”

“I see. I can't wait, I don't know how many years it's been since I last had a homemade cake.”

Ever since Koutarou lost his mother, he hadn't had any homemade cakes, so Koutarou was happy that for this chance.

“What about homemade chocolate?”

Kiriha presented her chocolate to Koutarou once again.

“I don't know how many years that has been either. But I won't take it today.”

“Then hold onto it.”

“Hey…”

“You'll help me look tomorrow and on Sunday, right?”

“…Well, I guess it's okay in that case.”

“You really are a stubborn man.”

“The same goes for you.”

“You're not wrong.”

Valentine's Day

And like that, Koutarou finally accepted Kiriha's chocolate. With her hands now empty, Kiriha grabbed onto Koutarou's arm and looked at him with provoking eyes.

“By the way… can I be hopeful for White Day?”

“Aren't you hoping for the wrong guy?”

Koutarou smiled wryly and dropped his shoulders.

“Don't be so cold… can't you just play along a little?”

“I'll definitely find your first love before my body gets ruined from playing with you.”

“That's the lowest of excuses to abandon a woman.”

“If you don't cut it out, even a peaceful guy like me will hit you.”

“I am already well aware that you are not the kind of man that would do that.”

“Seriously, you really have a problematic personality.”

“It is because I love you.”

“Hah…”

And as such the two's pretend lover play continued. Kiriha hadn't promised to help Shizuka until a little later.

Part 2

With Koutarou's constant stream of visitors, Kenji and the other boys had completely lost their chance to come out. There was no point in coming out and telling him that he had been pranked now. In reality, Koutarou already had four chocolates, and their prank was a massive failure.

…Could it be that, I am just a clown…?

Kenji was staring forward blankly as the sign in his hand fluttered in the wind and made a dry sound. Right now, Kenji felt like laughing in harmony with that sound.

“Curse you, Satomi!”

“Quit messing around, Koutarou!? What do you mean by that you are just like us and that you'd only get one or two chocolates!?”

“You're getting true love chocolate left and right!”

“You're the real traitor, Satomiiiiii!”

However, the boys with Kenji couldn't just laugh it off. They waited for Kiriha to leave before jumping out from behind the water tank.

“To arms! Our target is Satomi Koutarou!”

“Ooooooohhhh!”

Today, thanks to the betrayal of their charismatic leader, the unpopular boys alliance was disbanded.

Part 3

Having passed out, Koutarou came to when the sun was starting to set.

Ouch, that hurt…

What had woken him up was the pain for the injuries he had gotten from being beat up by the unpopular boys alliance members. If not for that, he would have been out a little while longer.

There were also one, no, two, more things that had helped with waking Koutarou up.

“Is Koutarou alright!? Will he be ok!? He won't die will he!?”

“Yes, he is alright. It seems they held back when they hit him.”

“I, I see… The fool… he could surely beat those guys with ease. Why didn't he put up a fight…?”

“That's the kind of person he is. That's just how our Satomi-sama is.”

“I already know that! I just needed an outlet for my anger!”

“If you don't like it, then you should stay by his side.”

“I will. I will protect him!”

“I have never heard of a princess protecting her knight though.”

“I will simply do as I please! Am I wrong!?”

“As you wish, my princess.”

What had helped to wake Koutarou up were two nearby voices, and upon hearing them after waking up from the pain, Koutarou's mind cleared up.

Is that Theia… and Ruth-san?

By the time he could remember whom those voices belonged to, he got a sense of his surroundings. He was currently lying down on something flat and wooden with something warm and soft as a pillow. Even with his eyes closed he could tell that his surroundings were dim, but strangely enough he wasn't feeling cold. It might have been thanks to the two presences nearby.

“Mm, Mmmm…”

Koutarou opened his eyes and blinked a couple of times. Since the day was nearing its end it wasn't particularly bright. But he did it to clear his mind.

“It seems he has woken up.”

“I-I see.”

Upon opening his eyes, Koutarou saw Ruth's face in front of him. He could also see Theia standing a little bit behind her. Theia was turned towards the side and wasn't looking at Koutarou. She was gazing at the setting sun.

“Good morning, Ruth-san. And Theia too.”

Koutarou looked around while saying his greetings. He was on the school's rooftop, lying on a bench. The warm and soft pillow he had felt had been Ruth's lap. After confirming his surroundings he looked back at Ruth and Theia.

“I am glad you are alright, Satomi-sama.”

“You are really unsightly.”

Ruth was smiling, but Theia was in a bad mood and sulking. Both their words and gestures were opposite.

“I have nothing I can say… ey up.”

Koutarou smiled wryly and pulled himself up.

“Owowow.”

His wounds began hurting right away. His injuries from yesterday’s fight still hadn't healed, and he instinctively showed a pained expression.

“Y-You fool! Just stay down! Your wounds hurt, right!?”

Theia who had been sulking hurriedly reached her hands out towards Koutarou. She grabbed Koutarou's shoulders and pushed him back down. She looked very worried and her bad mood from before was nowhere to be seen.

“I'm alright, Theia. You don't need to worry that much.”

“I-I am not worrying! I am just amazed!”

Theia finally noticed what she was doing when Koutarou pointed it out. She hurriedly removed her hands from him and showed a sulking expression once more.

“What are you blushing for?”

“S-Shut up, I'm not blushing!”

Shaken, Theia's voice faltered. Hearing her voice, Ruth gave her a helping hand.

“I will ask again, but how are you feeling, Satomi-sama?”

“Eh? Ah, I think I'm fine, I'm sorry for making you worry.”

“Phew…”

Thanks to Ruth's question, Koutarou's attention shifted and Theia let out a sigh of relief.

What am I so shaken for… this is just like normal…

Theia repeated that to herself, but she wasn't able to calm down.

“Well then, let's go home. Before it gets cold, the sun is setting after all.”

Completely unaware of Theia's feelings, Koutarou slowly got up. The places where he had been hit hurt, but it wasn't to the point where he couldn't move. Freezing on the rooftop was a bigger problem than that.

“Ah, w-wait!”

However, Theia grabbed the hem of Koutarou's clothes as he started moving.

“Theia?”

Koutarou stopped and looked at Theia. And upon being watched by Koutarou, Theia's face instantly turned red.

“What is it?”

“Ah, u-uhm… eh…”

Theia moved her mouth, but she couldn't say anything. Eventually she looked down and turned towards Ruth for help.

“Ruth, please… I can't continue, any f-further than this…”

“Yes, your highness.”

Ruth nodded at Theia, stood up, turned towards Koutarou and smiled. Unlike Theia, Ruth was just like always.

“Actually, Satomi-sama we came to give you chocolate.”

“Chocolate!? You did, Ruth-san!? Is this for real!?”

Upon hearing that Koutarou would get chocolate from Ruth, he forgot about his grudge over being hit and instinctively leaned in towards Ruth.

Koutarou…

Seeing Koutarou like that, Theia's expression brightened up slightly. However, she quickly hid that and looked at Koutarou with a sulking expression.

“Koutarou, are you happy that you'll get chocolate from Ruth?”

“Yeah, of course.”

Koutarou answered Theia and nodded like it was the obvious answer. He was happy to get chocolate from Ruth.

“Ruth is an alien you know? Are you fine with that?”

Theia continued to question Koutarou, it was like she was confirming Koutarou's feelings one at a time.

“What's that supposed to mean?”

Does he not mind that Ruth is an alien? Koutarou understood what her words meant, but he couldn't understand the intentions behind her question.

“Ruth is an alien, and a noble, even if her chocolate was a true love chocolate, and you became lovers, it might be hard to make a family… is what I mean.”

“Ah, so that's what you mean.”

Upon understanding the question, Koutarou closely examined it.

Because of her position, and we can't get along any better than already, would I still be happy to get chocolate, is what she means. Then…

Fortunately, Koutarou came up with answer right away.

“I would be happy if I were to get a true love chocolate, even if it's from an alien, a monster, a robot or anything really.”

More accurately, she got an answer for her question regarding the future.

Koutarou had been happy when he got the insignia of rank from Charl. The same was true when Alaia entrusted him with Signaltin. It didn't matter who he or the other person were. He was happy people gave him something out of trust or gratitude.

That's why his answer was the same this time.

“…Eh? R-Really…?”

Theia was puzzled by Koutarou's answer. And as she was puzzled, she began putting expectations on Koutarou.

He won't mind, even if it's an alien…? Can you be happy even if it's me and Ruth…?

Theia wanted to know of Koutarou's real intentions. It might have been an obvious answer for Koutarou, but it was more important than anything.

“What do you mean by really… Theia, you were the one who told me.”

Koutarou put his hand on his hips and smiled wryly.

“Eh? W-What did I say?”

“That what's important isn't the sword itself.”

“Wha—”

The moment she heard Koutarou's answer, Theia felt embarrassed. She realized that she was so obsessed over herself being an alien that she had overlooked the most important thing.

“This is just the same. I don't care about your body or where you're from. It would be a waste of chocolate, so give me ten or twenty pieces!”

“Koutarou…”

Koutarou's word spread throughout Theia's chest. And they eventually turned into hope that brightly shone on the dark clouds surrounding Theia's heart.

That's right, what was I so worried about. I was the one who said that Koutarou was a true knight…

Theia was so obsessed about her alien body and that they lived on different planets that she had lost sight of herself. She should have trusted her feelings more. She should have trusted that she would be able to make Koutarou happy after throwing all of her feelings at him.

“If there was a problem, it would be…”

“It would be?”

“Whether that chocolate was bitter or not.”

When she heard those words, large tears began flowing out from Theia's eyes. And without even trying to wipe them away she smiled at Koutarou.

“Then you don't need to worry. All of it is milk chocolate. You won't feel any bitterness…”

Koutarou, please live with us… I promise, if you choose me and Ruth, we will definitely prepare you a very sweet chocolate…

Theia believed that there was a future where they could all be happy. And even if there wasn’t one, she was resolute to make one herself. Theia would no longer hesitate, she would work towards that future with all her might.

“Your highness…”

In that moment, Ruth was able to sense the change in Theia's feelings. That was the first step towards the ideal that Ruth strived for. It was the moment where everything started…

Your highness, so you've made up your mind… that's it. Now everything will surely go well. And that's because Satomi-sama said that he was happy these past ten months…

Ruth trembled from joy and looked like she would start to cry any second now. However she held her feelings in, as she believed it was best to smile right now.

“Theia, why are you crying?”

“It's nothing, I was just casting away my own heart's weakness. I'm fine now.”

At last, Theia wiped her tears away. And her eyes began to shine, her eyes no longer gave off the impression of her worrying or suffering. She had wiped away her hesitation and uneasiness. Leaving behind her normal and powerful clear blue eyes.

Theia…?

However, there had been one big change from before, and that was the new feeling residing in her powerful eyes and how it greatly changed the atmosphere around them. Koutarou found himself unable to look away from those eyes.

Valentine's Day

“Ruth, give me the chocolate.”

“Yes, your highness.”

Ruth pulled out a small wrapped package from her bag and gave it to Theia. Theia then removed the wrapping, revealing a transparent case.

“Is this… Saguratin?”

“That's right. Me and Ruth made this.”

Inside the transparent case was a Saguratin made from chocolate. Some of the detailed parts had been simplified, but they had reproduced the design of the very sharp angled sword well.

“You too?”

“Yes.”

Hearing that Theia had made the chocolate with Ruth, Koutarou was overcome with a mysterious feeling.

What is this…? It was the same during the ski trip but this is more, different…

A warmth spread through his chest. And while he felt comfortable, he felt just as strongly that he wanted to protect this feeling. It was a feeling of security that he would feel from his parents. The feeling of duty of wanting to protect a small child. The two feelings intertwined and created a complex emotion.

“Satomi-sama. We have only made this chocolate sword, there is nothing else.”

Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day

“We have poured our feelings into this one chocolate… Will you accept it?”

“Yeah… thank you.”

Koutarou reached out with his hands as if he was being drawn in. It was incredibly difficult for him to disobey Theia right now.

“Thank you for everything, Satomi-sama.”

“And if possible, we want you to keep helping us in the future.”

“That's a given.”

Koutarou nodded firmly after receiving the case from Theia.

“A given, is it?”

Theia narrowed her eyes and slightly tilted her head. That expression was more gentle than usual.

“Yeah. Is that so strange?”

“Of course it's strange… If that's your answer I don't know what we were fighting over all this time. Fufufu.”

Theia laughed in a gentle voice, and Koutarou felt that her laughter was very comfortable. Even though just ten months ago, they would start fighting just when he heard that voice.

“But I won't let you win right away.”

“I understand. I don't want Kiriha to fall into any danger either.”

“…Thinking about it calmly, you're right about it being strange, Theia.”

“Right?”

Koutarou and Theia laughed together, they both looked so very happy. It was quite strange to see an invader and her victim together like that. But to them that was now their everyday life, and it should be their everyday from now on too.

Their laughter continued for a while longer. Ruth watched over her master whom she adored, and the legendary knight she had nothing but hopes for. With the miracle she had hoped for occurring right in front of her, she was satisfied.

And once the laughter had died down, Ruth finally opened her mouth.

“Your highness, Satomi-sama, let's go home. It is starting to get cold.”

The only worry Ruth really had now was their health.

“That's true. Let's go before we catch a cold.”

“I'm hungry.”

“Once we get home, Shizuka-sama's chocolate cake might be ready.”

“That's right, I almost forgot.”

The two agreed with Ruth's suggestion and the three of them headed towards the entrance to the rooftop.

Ruth, who was in the lead, opened the metal door and entered the school building. Theia followed behind her, however before she passed through the door she stopped and turned back to Koutarou.

“That's right, Koutarou, let me tell you something else that's strange.”

By turning around, Theia's golden hair swung around and shone in a burning red color as it was bathed in the setting sun's light. And at the same time, Theia's expression was shining just as much.

“Hm? What?”

Koutarou stopped, and the two stood so close that they could feel each other’s breaths.

“Actually… it's about that chocolate.”

Theia reached her hand out and touched the transparent case Koutarou was holding.

“What about it?”

“Yes. You see, this chocolate is without a doubt…”

Theia looked up at Koutarou and showed a mischievous smile.

“…a true love chocolate.”

Theia spoke those words as if it was nothing, but Koutarou couldn't do the same when he heard them.

“…Eh?”

The moment the words reached Koutarou's ears, he was unable to think. It was as if someone turned off the power to his brain.

“That's all I wanted to say. Brrr, now let's hurry home, Koutarou.”

Having said everything she wanted, Theia showed a satisfied smile and she left Koutarou behind and entered the school building.

“…Eh?”

Even after being left alone, Koutarou stood still on the roof for a little while longer.

Part 4

The chocolate cake making in Shizuka's room, room 206, was currently paused as the dough had been put in the oven. Since the plan was to eat the cake after dinner, it was more convenient to hold off on any more work until everyone was done eating.

Sanae and Yurika were still pressed up against the oven when Kiriha left Shizuka's room and headed to room 106 alone. Kiriha was planning on using her spare time before dinner to check on Koutarou's clothing. She would patch holes and turn over frayed parts. Since Koutarou was so active, it was important to check his clothing regularly.

“Now that I think about it, I haven't touched this drawer…”

Having opened the wardrobe, Kiriha pulled open the bottom drawer. The wardrobe had several drawers and the upper ones were summer clothes and the lower ones were winter clothes, so the clothes got thicker the lower you went. As a result, Kiriha hadn't checked the bottom drawer until it got really cold like today.

“They're clothes used during a more inactive time, but I'll give it a check.”

Kiriha pulled out the clothing in the drawer one at a time. After getting everything out, she would return everything that looked normal. That was her standard procedure.

“Oh?”

After Kiriha had pulled out all the clothing she noticed a paper bag pushed into the back of the drawer.

“Based on how it feels, this has clothing in it too…”

Kiriha picked up the paper bag and looked inside.

Inside was all kinds of stuff, not just clothing. There was a half-knit sweater, a knife that was old-fashioned, but well crafted, a wooden plate with wool decorations on it and more. None of the things inside seemed to have anything in common.

“Oh no… This was something I shouldn't have opened. Sorry, Koutarou.”

Looking at the things inside, Kiriha realized that they were memorabilia, and she decided to return it to the back of the drawer without touching anything inside.

However, when she was about to close the bag, her eye caught something.

“T-This is!?”

It was an antique necklace. The necklace had polished jewels and fangs strung together by a colorful string, it was more old-fashioned than modern accessories.

“What, h-how!?”

At first, Kiriha thought that the necklace was just an illusion. However, no matter how many times Kiriha blinked, the necklace didn't disappear.

“I'm not seeing things…”

Kiriha reached out towards the necklace. Her emotions were elevated and her hand was trembling. She was normally calm, but her heart was currently racing and her mind was blank.

Her fingertips reached for the necklace. And a feeling she remembered was transmitted to her brain. With her trembling fingers, she picked up the necklace and slowly pulled it out of the paper bag.

“T-There's no mistaking it… this is my mother's keepsake…”

Because her hand was trembling, the small stones and fangs on the necklace collided and made small sounds. It was almost like the sound of a pocket watch.

“But, why is it here!? This is impossible!”

Even though it was right in front of her, even though she was touching it, Kiriha couldn't believe that the necklace was right here. But regardless of what she believed, the necklace existed right here. It was the truth.

“But, no matter how much I can't believe it… if this is here then… that would mean…”

And that truth pointed to something.

What Kiriha had been waiting for these last ten years had finally happened.

Afterword

Long time no see, it's the author Takehaya.

With this volume we have returned to the main series. Thank you for purchasing it.

In this volume, the strongest invader legend finally manifests and begins to invade Koutarou's normal life. More specifically, an unexpected problem arises for Ruth and at the same time Valentine's Day is rapidly approaching, so it's a volume with various content. Because of these, Ruth who had mostly been in the shadows gets the spotlight on her.

When writing this volume I had something on my mind. And that was regarding translation.

Currently, there are two foreign versions of Rokujouma no Shinryakusha, a Taiwanese version and a South Korean version. There has been talk if another version is going to be added or not, but I have started by thinking about these two.

In the Japanese version the characters can be distinguished by how they call themselves, below is generally what they call themselves.

Ore — Koutarou

Atashi — Sanae

Warawa — Theia

Watashi — Yurika

Waga — Kiriha

Watakushi — Ruth

Oira — The Haniwas

On top of this, they can also be distinguished by what they say and the tone. Through this, you can omit who is talking.

However, a question popped into my mind the other day. Would this convey if it was translated to other countries?

I believe English would be an easy example. In English all subjects refer to themselves as I. As a result, Sanae, the Haniwas and everyone would call themselves I and it's not possible to distinguish them.

Moreover, there are not as many tone variations between the genders and social groupings as in Japanese. While there might be a difference when actually spoken, and expressed through body language, that wouldn't convey through just characters. So in English novel there are often dialects and slangs.

But this isn't about what language is more superior. It's only a difference between methods of communication. From an English speaker’s point of perspective, Japanese must look like an incredibly inefficient language, trying to convey everything through words, rather than also using expressions and body language. Compared to westerners, the Japanese have flat faces, so we developed a language that didn't require that. As a result we get a language that has a large variation of words.

So how do the Taiwanese and South Korean version of this novel look? I have gotten versions of them as samples, but since I'm not very proficient in any foreign language, I can't read either of them. But I am sure that these kind of differences exist in abundance. So I can imagine that the translators are putting in a lot of effort behind the scenes to fill in those differences.

So in conclusion to what I want to say… I am very grateful to the translators. And I hope we can work together in the future as well.

This afterword is four pages (which I am sure will shift depending on the translation. It's a surprisingly tough job) so, I will say my farewells now.

I would like to give my thanks to the editorial department that publish this novel, to Poco-san who always manages to make amazing illustrations for the strange stories I write, my friends who take me drinking whenever I get stuck, and to those who bought this novel.

Well then, let us meet in the afterword of Volume 10.

January, 2012 Takehaya